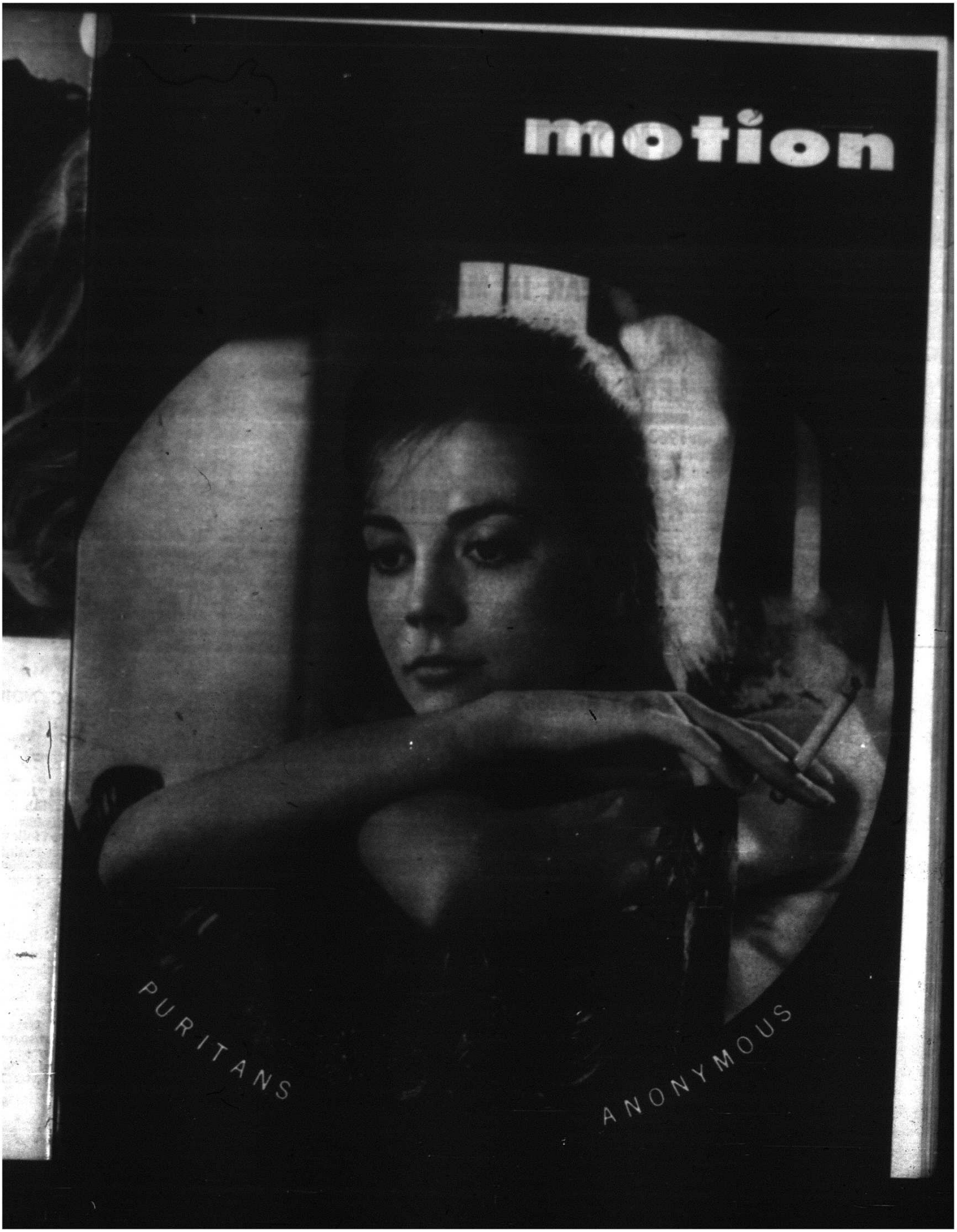
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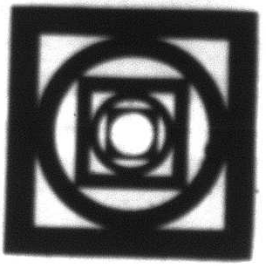

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PURITANS ANONYMOUS

No. 6 Autumn 1963
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Puritanism is as old as the hills. Its name legion. It has a 1000 masks and a 1000 faces. primitive forms are as beyond all conject- e as what song the syrens sung. Wherever easure shines, there, like its shadow, are fear, ection, guilt.

We mean by "puritanism", first, the British rsions of orthodox Calvinism; second, the otestant-bourgeois-capitalist nexus established Max Weber and R. H. Tawney; and third, it mixture of religion and rationalism which came Christian orthodoxy once theologians d married the thought of Plato to that of St. Paul, and which Matthew Arnold evolved into its agnostic form. Behind these looms a broader sense — applying to all those philosophies that aspire, not, like Aristotle's, to a judicious balance of selfishness and altruism, of baseness and loftiness, but, like Plato's, to an actual *eradication* of "unworthy" impulses, however deeply they plunge into the soul. In that sense, every moral code has its own puritanism. Puritanism may be pessimistic ("we are all born corrupted, our wills must be broken for our own good"), or optimistic ("we are all born innocent and kind *really*"); there are puritanisms of reason (Aldous Huxley), of power, of success, of sensuality (D. H. Lawrence).

"High culture" is traditionally associated with Christian-rationalist "purification" — the academic world even thinks of itself as the "saving remnant", "the salt of the earth". But "low culture", from folk-art to the best in the mass media, has a lower moral polarity, an Aristotelian, even a Rabelaisian, relaxation. A magazine like MOTION is subject to, and born out of, the tension between the two.

With the new "humane sciences" (or semi-sciences) of sociology, anthropology, and depth psychology, the plasticity, the moral ambivalence of human nature, far from being covert, as hitherto, has become so glaring as to force an "agonising reappraisal" of cultural values — and therefore of artistic ones. Is *all* puritanism, in *any* moral code, the result of a hidden anxiety, suspicion, hatred, rendering it more insidious than the lax amiability of Peacock, Fielding, Rabelais? Is "moral striving" itself a trap; the devil-a-monk-would-be quoting scripture for his own purposes, happy to hate sin so long as he is allowed to hate something? or are puritan *ideals* essential to every morality?

Current puritanism must inevitably evolve as steadily as its historic predecessors. The question arises, even for non-puritans, which of its traits are wheat, which are tares? This issue of MOTION is devoted to such aspects of this question as appear in cinema.

A young man and young woman on a motor-cycle: all, on the surface, is well: how is it, then, that as the cuple ride, ride interminably it seems, at ever-increasing speed, through eternlly unwinding lanes and dizzily flashing high-roads, past apparently sluggish cars and lorries, the wind in their hair and their faces inscrutably silent — how is it that there should be communicated to us, in a tightening blend of the ostensibly innocent and the underlyingly uneasy, such a definite sense of foreboding, the positive assurance that things are not as they seem, and that *something is going to happen*? Is it because at one point the riders, almost compulsively, road-fork? Or because we fancy that, on the back of the vehicle directly in front of them, we can discern a dimly painted skeleton? Then, suddenly, the young man is trying to pass this vehicle, on a precariously narrow stretch of road: the cycle draws up — then sinks away again — draws up, then once more falls behind. And the driver of the vehicle for the first and only time turns his ghastly dead face towards us — AND LAUGHS! A blinding crash, a confusion and then, tranquillity — as, in a final, pulverisingly unexpected image, two coffins, black-crossed, white-palled, are borne on a subterranean barge over a great river. But now, at last, we understand the fateful ambiguity in the title of Carl Dreyer's film. The young man and woman have accomplished the aim of their furious journey. *They Caught The Ferry*.

II

They Caught The Ferry (1948) was conceived — we are told, simply as a road-safety short. But Dreyer executed it and in its way, this story (a man and a girl abruptly struck down — by Death, Destiny, God, the Devil, call it what you like) symbolizes the whole national and cultural tradition of peculiarly superstitious Puritanism which is reflected so persistently in Scandinavian cinema.

The tradition goes right back to the silent days, finding one of its earliest, most remarkable and fascinating sources in Benjamin Christensen's semi-documentary *Haxan* (1918-20). Unfortunately, this survey of demonology through the ages has neither a dramatic unity (unlike, say, Dennis Wheatley's black magic novels) nor a historical unity (unlike Nicole Vedrès's similar kaleidoscope on a very dissimilar subject, *Paris 1900*). It suffers from an uninspired, ineffectively resolved fictional element, plus an excessive bias towards the pre-contemporary. (Modern parallels of nymphomania, kleptomania, clairvoyance, etc, receive merely a hurried closing sequence). Yet despite these faults, Christensen, his cast, his cameraman Johan Ankerstjerne and his art director Holst-Jorgensen, have left us some truly fantastic fragments.

A serving-maid buys an aphrodisiac which causes her master, a huge and glutinous priest, to chase her round and round the dining-room and out into the fields. A nun impales a Host on a dagger, removes a statue of the Infant Christ from the Virgin's arms, and, when discovered, puts out her tongue at the Mother Superior. Broomsticks flap black across a moonlit sky as witches gather for a Sabbat. At the ensuing orgy, inefficient devils are made an example of; women dance jigs on crucifixes, and ceremonially pass before Lucifer himself — *pour embrasser le derrière*. Satan (played by the director) leaps gigantic, tongue-lolling, from behind a chair, or appears in the night to call a wife who rises naked from her husband's bed, voluptuously to submit to him; or summons a young girl from sleep, out into a misty down, where the great beast waits. Two old women sit down in the evening on the doorstep of Martin the notary, fill their chamberpots with steaming hot turds, wipe themselves clean on their dresses, then hurl the ordure against the porch. In the morning (not surprisingly?), Martin is discovered to be dead. And near the end of the film, Maren Pedersen — a twisted, derelict crone whom Christensen chose from many like her in a Copenhagen hospice — raises her wizened head to declare, with absolute conviction: "I myself have seen the Devil; he sat one morning at the foot of my bed".

THE ROAD T

III

Haxan illustrates all the religio-sexual themes of Puritanism, Puritan art and Puritan movies — especially in relation to Scandinavia: themes of ecclesiastical or marital, spiritual or carnal disobedience, with the guilty protagonists punished by the community, or by divine intervention, or by both. And very often religious and sexual errancy are combined — in the character of a member of the Church who yields to erotic temptation. This figure is common to Scandinavian and Anglo-American literature: a fact synthesised in the screen version of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* which Victor Sjöstrom made in Hollywood in 1926.

The first third of Frances Marion's script, with its comedy by which the heroine, who peeps at herself in mirrors despite covering cloth which warn her that vanity's a sin, is put in the stocks for letting loose a singing bird in the Sabbath, and later shocks the young parson with a sight of prohibited panties (not to mention the delicious vignette of the courting couple who must conduct their wooing at opposite

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TO HEAVEN . . .

DOUGLAS McVAY STANDS AT THE WAITING FERRY

nds of a chastely separating speaking-tube: Father!", shrieks the girl when her boy-friend breaks the rules with a quick neck, "I refuse o marry a man of such unbridled passions!"), s actually a significant prelude to the deadly eriousness of devout reaction and prejudice which is brought to bear on the heroine and her clerical lover in the second third. The girl's eply to the father of her child, when he announes his intention of sharing the blame with her "Do not tear down the ideals your flock has ased on you"), has a nobility only surpassed y her declaration in the climactic scaffold scene, Would that I could endure his agony as well s my own". Later, the growing child's imitaton of the letter "A" upon her mother's breast, nd the humiliation of mother and daughter y the mudslinging of children whose attitude conditioned by their parents, provide telling oments. In the last third, when the heroine's ng-lost husband makes a *diabolus ex machina* eturn, drama tends to slip towards melodrama; ut there is still the dubiously funny spectacle of the ducking stool, the revelation of the brand on the parson's chest, and the final chastened head-baring by the Boston populace. Lillian Gish, at the point during the concluding section where she loosens her hair, looks lovelier than I have ever seen her; while giving in general one of her most restrained, sincere and serious performances (confirming her as, with Louise Brooks, the screen's outstanding female silent star: Garbo was just an over-rated pudding in *Gosta Berling* and *The Joyless Street*, only blossoming when she got to the States). Lars Hanson — also remembered from *Gosta Berling* — supports her admirably, gaunt and wild-eyed as the conscience-ridden preacher.

Sjöstrom's *The Wind* (1928) was an American production with American writers, too: but like *The Scarlet Letter*, it remains far less of an American picture in mood that Stroheim's *Greed* (which it incidentally resembles in its uncompromising wedding night episode). Griffith, for instance, could never have brought himself to take so realistic a view of sex as we get in

this long sequence where Lillian (once more an orphan of the storm) has been forced to obtain security by marrying a man physically unattractive to her. Under Sjöstrom's guidance, she captures the girl's nervousness with a precision only matched by Hanson's depiction of the husband's hesitant, embarassedly giggling, but steadily mounting and at last angrily frustrated lust. This erotic candour, which stamps the film immediately with its director's Swedish nationality, is present throughout: from the early jealousy of Lillian's aunt, who believes her niece to be alienating the affections of her husband, to the climax in which Lillian — raped by the man who had previously attracted her until he turned out to have a wife — sees him in revulsion for what he is, refuses to go away with him, and when he threatens her, kills him.

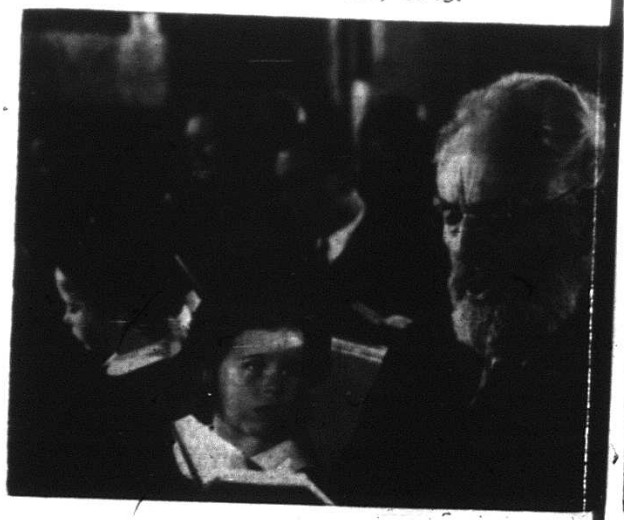
Another essentially Scandinavian quality of the piece is its insistence on Nature as illustrative of human passions. The wind, above all the great northerly hurricane, is synonymous with psychological unrest and imbalance, and is identified by the superstitious prairie folk with a phantom white horse that descends from the mountains (cf. the white horses of Rosmersholm in Ibsen). Prior to the rape the tempest gradually rises, in a brilliantly shot scene with Gish alone in the rattling cabin lit by an eerily swinging lamp; at the norther's peak the rapist arrives; next morning, the deed done, everything is calmer. The murder, again, is superbly staged, as he dares her to shoot, and when she wavers attempts to grab the gun — only for her to pull the trigger, and the camera to track abruptly in on him as he sinks slowly, incredulously to the ground. Then, when she endeavours to bury him, the blowing sand does the job for her, and there's a macabre image of his half-submerged face staring up from the earth. "The wind always covers up those who've been deservedly slain", says Lillian's husband: and she (who's come to care for him after her initial repugnance) is fully reconciled to her conjugal position. (Other fine moments: the coach ride across the gusty plain at the beginning, the bitter aunt stroking her meat-cutting knife—and a beautiful glimpse of the Gish girl in a mirror, though elsewhere she tends to over-act with staring eyeballs at violent crises . . .)

IV

The Wind, therefore, whilst superficially a not particularly Puritanical indictment of rape, is in reality a subtle — and entirely Puritanical — argument for the unglamorous husband against the glamorous would-be lover. And in many of the Scandinavian movies of the sound era, this argument is repeated: frequently deprecating, by inference, not merely sexual misdemeanour, but even ordinary, supposedly legal and accepted forms of sexual union and pleasure. Thus in Alf Sjöberg's *The Road to Heaven* (1942), the hero's youthful promise of happiness is destroyed when his beloved is burnt as a witch: he sets out in a pilgrimage in search of celestial justice — but himself grows old and corrupt (as a penance for daring to question the Almighty's decree?), before being miraculously restored to his previous young idealism. In Gustaf Molander's *Ordet (The Word)*, made the following year, a youthful preacher is nearly driven insane with grief after his fiancée is killed in an accident: but at the end God allows him, now a Myshkin-like "holy fool", to resurrect the girl. These finales of divine clemency simultaneously carry a certain note of gentle divine reproof: a sort of "Oh ye of little faith" air. In Anders Henrikson's *Blood and Fire* (1945), it is a Salvation Army veteran who loses faith — being carnally drawn to a tart with a heart. Then we are introduced to a mystical Salvationist lady who exercises supernatural control over the rest of the characters. The villain of the piece, a boxer living on the prostitute's earnings, is first physically paralysed by this visionary, Nordic Sarah Brown, and then (after arbitrarily shooting the veteran in the back) is equally arbitrarily converted to Christ (through violence, it is impossible to resist the assumption).

Molander's *Woman Without a Face* (1947) tells of a happily married young man who has an affair with a nympho — but ultimately returns to his wife. The heroine of Hasse Ekman's *Girl With A Hyacinth* (1950) is a lesbian —

Previous page:
THE PLOUGH AND THE STARS.
The Tower of lies (Sjostrom, 1928)
Below:
FAITH,
Victor Siostrom seen in
Gustaf Molander's **The Word**, 1943.



and commits suicide. In Egil Holmsen's *Hasthandlaren's Flicker (The Time of Desire)*, produced in 1954, the lesbianism is between sisters, expressed in a connoisseur's nude bathing scene. "I like myself", says one girl, onanistically caressing; "Is that wrong?". And then: "Do you like me? I want you to like me *completely*". "I do", her sister answers. "Kiss me, then!", the other commands. She does. "Kiss me again". She does. They fall over into the pond together. But that's about as far as we get. Puritan disapproval interrupts matters: the girls' tendencies are cured by a hero who seduces one of them; and to make the Puritanical onslaught on illicit sex — or sex of any description? — complete, once the seduced sister finds that she is pregnant, she breaks with her lover.

V

Aesthetically, the above films range from respectable (*The Word*: Molander stages the resurrection sequence professionally), through dull (*The Road to Heaven, Woman Without a Face, Girl With a Hyacinth*), to plain ridiculous (*Blood and Fire, The Time of Desire*). But Arne Mattson's *Hon Dansade en Sommar (One Summer of Happiness*: 1951) is on quite another level. What does one remember from this underpraised work? Monochrome photography by Göran Strindberg that glitters; music by Sven Skold which mingles the native melodies of Sweden with a yearning, almost savage accompaniment to the scenes of passion; a director with poetry in him; an actor and an actress who soar. The stunning opening shot of the student lover walking to his dead mistress's funeral along a windy high-road—and his agony (marvellously conveyed by Folke Sundquist) as he watches her being buried and feels all eyes turned unforgivingly upon him. And then in flashbacks, the corn-coloured, sleepy-golden loveliness, the sensual purity of Ulla Jacobson singing to him; and his own playing of the organ; and their bathing scene; and her death scene.

The picture's sole flaw lies in the needless brief appearances of the aged peasant: yet in his fashion he is justifiable and excusable, as a symbol of superstition and a kind of Greek chorus. For this story (adapted by W. Semitjov from Ekstron's novel "Sommar dansen") is at once totally indigenous yet strangely classical in its atmosphere of strict repression. In addition, its central tragedy harks back to the star-cross'd Italianate lovers of "Romeo and Juliet". Here, as there, the girl's death (although its accidental nature, after a period of ecstatic joy, shocks us and makes us weep for the couple as we never do for the gloomy, so obviously doomed pair in Cacoyannis's *Girl in Black*) appears oddly inevitable in view of all that has preceded it. In this case, besides, one may say that the tragedy is made explicit *after* the catastrophe — in that the accident furnishes those community-members who tainted the love-affair with a heaven(!)-sent opportunity for self-acquittal. The hole-in-corner suspicions, the antagonistic parents, the rigid church opposition to natural emotions: these things are endemic in this poignant study of two youngsters persecuted by the prudery of their "elders and betters". The pathos

FAITH **(left)**:
the bathing scene in
Arne Mattsson's **One Summer of Happiness** (1951)

ANGUISH **(below)**:
an Ingmar Bergman script,
Mai Zetterling and Alf Kjelling in Sjoberg's
Frenzy (1944)

of the narrative might have come straight out of the Dark Ages: it is a narrative where the word "love" is required to mean only the word "marriage"; a narrative about people who think so much of the Devil that they forget God. The final scene is crushingly ironic, as the fanatical priest dares to stand over the girl's grave and, gazing at the tortured student, intone that her death was caused by ruthlessness. Yes — but whose ruthlessness? The farmer, in his touching, flower-laden tribute, manages to put our own feelings adequately into words: "Judge not, for you yourself will be judged". This, surely, must be the text of *One Summer of Happiness* — a film where "God's Judgment" is a thing not to be loved, but feared.

VI

Ingmar Bergman's output merits separate consideration, since in quantity and quality it surpasses the achievements of any of the directors (Dreyer excepted) cited up to now. Yet the influence of Puritanism on Bergman proves comparatively limited: confined to what I take to be his three most pessimistic pictures. The prostitute heroine of *Fängelse* (1949) is preyed on by nightmarish tormentors who murder her illegitimate child, burn her with cigarettes, and eventually drive her to suicide by slashing her wrists; whereas the author hero is reconciled with his wife *à la Woman Without a Face* — and the script's last words are "If you don't believe in God, then there's no way out". Several sequences cast the virtuoso Bergman spell: elegiac, idyllic firelit close-ups of a love scene give place to a fearful dream, in which the deprived mother sees her seducer gutting a fish over a bath (just as the baby was killed in a bath); an episode with a sadist possesses vicious tension; the images of the girl's face in her suicide contain in Göran Strindberg's black-and-white camerawork great beauty and sadness; and Doris Svedlund plays her with forlorn skill. But (apart from its clearly less merciful attitude towards the fallen woman than in Bergman's much superior *Hamnstad*), this is one of the director's most enigmatic, overheated experimental and solipsistic films.

Summer with Monika (1952) is far more satisfying, even though its Puritanism is far more complete. It is an account of two restless teenagers who, after a few months' motor-boat holiday, marry with a child coming — but, when the girl's continued disillusionment at life's struggle leads to her infidelity, part. Per Anders Fogelstrom's script is consistently credible, Gunnar Fischer's monochrome photography delicately toned, Harriet Andersson and Lars Ekborg give excellently naturalistic performances as the young couple, and there are some memorable visual moments: the girl gently unbuttoning the boy's shirt on the sofa; the boy slowly pushing one of his employer's glasses to the edge of a shelf, until it drops — to his utter satisfaction; the girl awakening in contentment to the morning sun dappling the boat-cabin ceiling and the tick of the alarm-clock, her face in close-up on the pillow; his expression of reverent wonder and joy as he strokes her naked shoulders and breasts on the beach, hers of absolute giving only changing as she stays his hand when the caress to her nipples becomes too exciting; the routine embrace after horseplay which suddenly tautens into stillness and her surrender as he drops his lips to her neck; the tracks in to close-ups of him as he first sees his child, and her as she prepares for a round of night life (the second long-held to jazz soundtrack); the closing dissolve into his wistful, lonely recollection of their peak of fulfilment on the sands, of her nude body running down to the water's edge.

But Bergman's masterpiece in the Puritanical (and the romantic) genre is the unaccountably neglected *Sommarlek (Summer Interlude)*, which he made in 1950. To some extent it foreshadows *Monika:* but where in *Monika* the collapse of the couple's relationship is due to the fact that pre-maritally promiscuous happiness doesn't always last when the partners are saddled with connubial responsibilities, that of *Sommarlek* is provoked by a cliff accident at the holiday's close, in which the boy is killed.

"That's life", the heart-broken girl is told. Well, perhaps it is, but life isn't art: and whereas comparable incidents in *Hon Dansade en Sommar* (or Lorenza Mazzetti's *Together*) seem so much the logical outcome of character and plot that they appear genuinely tragic climaxes, *Sommarlek* (scripted by the director and Herbert Grevenius) doesn't really make the full transition from melodrama. The deaf-mute of *Together* falls into the Thames because of the handicap which prevents him from realising his danger; the Puritanical villagers of *Hon Dansade* regard the motor-bike crash as God's judgment on the illicit adolescent lovers. Here, however, what hints of doom there are — in the heroine's lecherous "uncle", and the curious premonitions which boy and girl experience — remain too slight and unintegrated for the final mishap to look anything other than a bit of bad luck. In a sense this increases the Puritanism; but it doesn't increase the artistic stature.

Yes, *Sommarlek* has faults, in a way that *Summer with Monika* has not. It isn't an authentic tragedy like *Hon Dansade:* and its leading male player, Birger Malmsten, isn't afforded the chances that Mattsson's film afforded Folke Sundquist — or for that matter *Monika* Lars Ekborg. But then, this is a picture in which the script and supporting performances count for relatively little, the direction and star performances for all. Stylistically, *Sommarlek* out-

FLESH AND THE ANGEL: Lillian Gish in **The Wind**

shines both *Monika* and *Hon Dansade*, notwithstanding their elegance: while Maj-Britt Nilsson in the role of the dancer Mari, if she doesn't wholly get the better of Ulla Jacobsson in Mattsson's piece, surpasses the Monika of Harriet Andersson. Looking in the scenes of youth like a young Bergman (Ingrid this time, not Ingmar), and in the older scenes like Celia Johnson in *Brief Encounter* (muffin hat included), she plays the delightfully written passages of sensuous teenage dialogue for even more than they are worth, and nearly succeeds in persuading us, by her pale, set beauty of face and clipped hardness or weariness of voice, that the reminiscing ballerina is a tragic figure regardless. Fine acting can and will redeem the hoariest corn, the legendary *weltschmerz* of the theatrical entertainer being no exception. Miss Nilsson's greater compatriot Garbo proved it as yet another *danseuse* in *Grand Hotel:* and I need hardly mention Olivier's Archie Rice. Here now is a third example.

Bergman dwells on his heroine from first to last: on the lithe, supple cat's grace of her agile body leaping from rock to river in its black jersey and jeans or swimsuit; on the soft lines and pores of her skin, and her dark eyes in huge close-up; on the gurgling fun and lure of her as she teases and cajoles her hesitant boy. In its delicacy and panache, its easy switching of moods, its range encompassing both bobbysoxer and mature woman of the world, this is surely the most enchanting portrayal to be found in the Bergman canon — only equalled, in a starkly different way, by Eva Dahlbeck in *Brink of Life*. And the film itself, responding to her, framing her in perfect settings, has a visual and atmospheric magic, a spontaneity of landscape, a sweet simplicity unmatched by the rest of his pictures. One remembers, notably, the long early sequence where Nilsson gets gaily up with the lark, hums, carols and scratches, struggles out of her shortie and into her bathing costume, scrubs at her teeth with brush and water, picks up rod and line and takes by boat to the sunsparkling stream in the dewlapped morning, drifting languorously along until she meets the youth with whom she goes on to chatter and explore, laugh and provoke to kissing; the moment when she at last makes him take her on the cabin floor, their arms afterwards waving, caressing and intertwining before us in close-shot like two carefree animals; and the similarly sustained scene near the end, on the eve of disaster, where she sketches zany little cartoons for him (and we see them animated), tells him to be true to her otherwise his nose and ears and "other things" will fall off, swears mock-modestly that she's an innocent maiden and he must promise to marry her if he wants to spend the night with her, and when he says he'd like to gobble her up, asks him — which part first? This episode has something of the endearingly idiosyncratic, evanescent lyricism and wit of the mansion scene in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Sommarlek has been patronizingly labelled as the most "beautiful" of the director's films. It is: but without the perverted commas. For

me, only *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries*, *Brink of Life* and *The Virgin Spring* can rank with it amongst the Bergmans I've seen.

VII

And so we revert to Dreyer, and to the ambivalence (already noticed in the "road safety" short *They Caught the Ferry*) so recurrent in the Puritan-Scandinavian cinema: faintly, in pictures like Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928) and Sjöberg's 1950 *Miss Julie* (which have respective undertones of Puritanical denunciation of witchcraft and sexual immorality — even though Joan's downfall is primarily due to political, and Julie's to social, causes); more strongly in *The Scarlet Letter*, *Hon Dansade en Sommar* and Dreyer's *Day of Wrath* (1943), which may either be interpreted as Puritanical cautionary-tales or scathing *attacks* on Puritanism.

This is especially true of *Day of Wrath* — which, alone of these three films, strikes me as a "cautionary tale" rather than an anti-Puritan indictment. Dreyer's adaptation of the play "The Witch", which John Masefield in turn based on Wiers Jenssen's novel "Anne Pedersdotter", is the screen's most hypnotically gripping demonological melodrama. I call it "melodrama", but perhaps (although the fact that in the cold light of day one does not after all really believe in witches must ultimately deny it tragic validity, and the film greatness) it deserves a more substantial description: certainly it comes near enough, while you are watching it, to making you suspend your disbelief.

From the moment when the old woman Herlof's Marthe (who, though unjustly arraigned in that she has never *used* the secrets of necromancy, yet has *known* them) is driven by sheer physical fear of the stake to utter her threefold imprecation, one is riveted to the screen as the curse is inexorably fulfilled on priest, and husband, and wife. This is not the say that the earlier scenes, with their flavour of modern McCarthyism, don't hold and move us to pity and terror and indignation; but only when the Devil, awakened by the curse, takes possession of the girl in whom he has lain hereditary and dormant, are we in turn wholly possessed by the story, as by the sense of him. The figure of Anne absorbs us: it is Anne's young face, first innocent, then shamelessly aware, which we carry away in our minds; Anne's witch-mouth which widens from maiden seriousness into perpetual sensual laughter, and indeed bewitches; Anne's soft voice which openly mocks and deceives mother-in-law and husband, but whispering draws Martin, her husband's son, to her in enslavement; Anne's young body, soft and hidden beneath the decorum of her ankle-length dress, which naked becomes a torch that finally lights her own death-fire. Lisbeth Movin, in every slant-eyed look and she-bat's smile and sway and gesture and intonation, makes the subjugation of the gauche Martin utterly plausible.

Anna Svierkier, however, as Herlof's Marthe, achieves a heartrending cameo: and the rest of the cast offers unerring support. So much stays in the memory: the austerity of the dialogue (written by Dreyer in collaboration with Poul Knudsen and Mogens Skot-Hansen), the use of music (e.g., the *Dies Irae* at the beginning and end), and Lis Tribert's settings (largely bare stone interiors, bleakly lit and shadowed in Carl Anderson's monochrome photography); the opening sequence, with Herlof's Marthe dumbly conscious of her danger; the first rapt meeting of Martin and Anne; the pitiful discovery of the old woman in the house of Anne's husband Absolon, and the subsequent tortures of inquisition; the deceptively peaceful wanderings of Anne and Martin through sunlit fields, which suddenly seem to darken (the darkening reflected in Poul Schierbeck's score) at the sight of faggots being gathered for a stake; the horror of the burning itself, as Herlof's Marthe crashes bodily into the flames, and the little children watch and sing holy song (a single title concludes: "On this, a very beauteous day, was Herlof's Marthe safely burnt, to the greater glory of God"). Absolon tells his wife of her dead mother's supernatural powers: and lo! she breathes her desired one's name upon the night air — "Martin!" — and he comes . . .

Out into that night they go to make love, and hereafter Anne does not — cannot? — hide her sorceress's nature from those who can prove nothing. On a later night, as a storm symbolically crackles (cf. *The Wind*), she paces the room, looking relevantly like Cesarès' Princess: wishes her husband's death: and then engineers it (a sequence only paralleled in *The Little Foxes*, and highlighted by Absolon's abrupt, stricken finger-twitch). But for her this final act marks nemesis: Martin is ravaged by remorse (see how Dreyer has his heroine's protesting mouth leap up minutely and momentarily in the bottom right-hand corner of the frame); and although he promises he will not betray her, when Absolon's mother has taken the first step and he himself stands by his father's bier, he feels at last the full might of the Church around him and the pressures of his own sin — and does so. Why do I regard Anne as a *bona fide* witch rather than just an unlucky adulteress? Well, I could point to such things as her knowing smile when Absolon says that he has felt Death touch him. But above all, in this closing scene, when asked to lay her hand on the corpse as a superstitious proof of innocence — WHY DOESN'T SHE? There can only be one answer: and for her, Charon waits.

BY IAN JOHNSON

"Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass
Glory in the flower
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind"

"WHEN I WAS A BOY, SON, THERE WAS ALWAYS TWO KINDS OF GIRLS" ★

A GIRL DRIFTS blissfully in a lake of opaque green to a death blessed with the sweetest of oblivion. A crowd emerges from a chapel: a simple event, yet muffled, numb, confusing. A detached view of a New Year's party; but even in long-shot decay and corruption spill over into the celebrations and we are aware that we watch the death paroxysm of a generation. The qualities which in *East of Eden* Kazan instilled from time to time imbue nearly every foot of *Splendour in the Grass*. In its psychologically shocking and intangible combination of reality, surrealism, and febrile emotionalism, its feel is almost allegoric.

In conception and moral, too, the themes — social and psychological, spiritual and material, romantic and puritan, the group and the individual — are inseparably interwoven. An elder, staider, generation and a vibrantly youthful "jazz age" generation are contrasted. Changing moralities place unbearable strains upon a young couple poised equivocally between patriarchal and matriarchal ideals. The Wall Street crash becomes the film's catalyst and pin-points the close of one social climate and the opening of another. And everybody changes in the film; the entire world becomes more chastened, mellow, and sad.

Bud Stamper (Warren Beatty) and Deanie Loomis (Natalie Wood) are necking in a car before a waterfal (1). Deanie longingly pulls Bud down into the seat. but then resists: and this opening sequence forshadows in miniature the action which follows. At Deanie's house, Bud says a disgruntled goodnight — "we've had enough kissin' for tonight" — while prying behind the curtains is Mrs. Loomis, Deanie's mother (Audrey Christie). Mrs. Loomis betrays the typical puritan trait of an intense repugnance cum fascination for sex. She warns Deanie that to retain a man's "respect" is everything: "Your father never laid a hand on me until we were married. An' when I, I just gave in because a wife has to. A woman doesn't enjoy those things the way a man does. She lets her husband come near her in order to have children". Yet she makes no effort to break up the affair. Why should she hinder an advantageous marriage with the rich Stampers? Small town gossip, prudery, and mean-mindedness are part of the ethos with which Deanie is surrounded, whether it be neighbours peering behind their curtains at Deanie and

★ Comment by Ace Stamper in Splendour in the Grass.
1. Water symbolism is a recurring theme of Splendour in the Grass, and indeed of most of Kazan's recent work It would repay study.

SPLENDOUR IN THE GRASS, U.S.A. 1961. An N.P.I. production distributed by Warner-Pathe. Directed and produced by **Elia Kazan.** Screenplay by **William Inge.** Photography in Technicolor by **Boris Kaufman.** Edited by **Gene Milford.** Art director, **Richard Sylbert.** Music by **David Amram.** 124 mins.

Wilma Dean Loomis, **Natalie Wood;** Bud Stamper, **Warren Beatty;** Mrs. Loomis, **Audrey Christie;** Ace Stamper, **Pat Hingle;** Ginny Stamper, **Barbara Loden;** Del Loomis, **Fred Stewart;** Angelina, **Zohra Lampert;** Mrs. Stamper, **Joanna Roos;** Juanita Howard, **Jan Norris.**

Bud about to kiss, or the gossip of Mrs. Loomis:

MRS. L: M'm that Ginny Stamper is too low for the dogs to bite. Come here: (*She gives Deanie some wool to hold, while she winds it into a ball).* She met some man in Chicago, put her in a family way. Mrs. Stamper had to go out there an' get 'er, take 'er to a doctor.

(*Mr. Loomis stops at the door and calls in*).

DEL: Store's all locked up.

MRS. L: (*Looks up*) Good. (*Turns back to Deanie, whispering)* To have one o' those awful operations performed.

DEANIE: Oh, Mom, that's gossip.

MRS. L: Every word is true. I was at the DAR this afternoon an' heard all about it. Mrs. Whitcomb lives right across the street from the Stampers and she knows everything that goes on in their house. That's what happens to girls who go wild and boy crazy.

While Deanie's dominating parent is her mother, Bud finds the sway held by his father, Ace (Pat Hingle). Beside their partners neither the good-natured Mr. Loomis nor the amiable Mrs. Stamper are very effectual. Ace and Mrs. Loomis have one major interest: money. If Mrs. Loomis, the petit bourgeois, is more retentive and acquisitive — classic puritan traits — Ace is the braggart, the spendthrift, the man who believes absolutely in the authority of money -- traits typical of the *arriviste.* And like most businessmen Ace is the father-identifier: he shows little respect for women, whether recommending them as lab material for Bud's excess energy or subjugating his timid wife. Both Ace and Mrs. Loomis are puritans, and both are bigots. Just as Mrs. Loomis lectures Deanie, it isn't long before Ace is giving Bud advice. Before Ace stands a model oil derrick, a massive phallic symbol. For Ace Stamper money and sex are alike, and he treats both as a commercial commodity in the manipulation of people and stocks. (At the end of the film as his world crumbles around him, he tries to please his son with a substitute, a chorus girl who just looks like Deanie). Maybe money has even replaced sex. He is probably less virile than he seems, and his limp, with him since he fell off a derrick, may be symbolic castration, an idea reminiscent of the character in Inge's *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs* whose fortunes in oil was made from insurance money he collected after putting a bullet through his foot. Ace is anxious for Bud to forget his own ambitions to farm and to marry Deanie (maybe, we suspect, because by the end of a four-year college course he hopes Bud will have forgotten her). Inevitably Ace gets his own way, while Mrs. Stamper stands ineffectually eavesdropping in the doorway.

So Bud tells Deanie she must wait, and he tells her in the car, while rain, like spermatozoa, beats ineffectually against the windscreen.

The crisis has come, and William Inge as the minister is preaching a moral and a warning: "Lay not up treasures for yourself on earth...", but Ace is asleep. The congregation leaves the church, and there is a surreal moment as the organ plays, snatches of dialogue drift by, the rain falls. Ace is telling Bud "all I'm askin' yuh to do is keep an eye on her while I'm in New York. She likes you, son. She won't do anything crazy when you're around". And we see of sister Ginny just one gartered leg poking through from the rear seat of the car.

Virginia (Barbara Loden), the black sheep of the Stamper family, has failed wholly to live up to her name. At first glance she is the reverse of Deanie: sexy, jazzy, superficial: maybe a feminine response to Ace's own aggressiveness. In reality, both Inge and Kazan know the boundary between the good bad girl and the bad good girl is a slender one. It is a recurring American image, reminding us how Victorian the Americans are (1).

Ginny's problem is diagnosed quite early on. At the breakfast table she has a tussle with her father. She wouldn't mind, she says, going "to live with Aunt Florrie and study art". A phallic coffeepot spout is banged down in near close-up. "Art who?" asks Ace. Grappling with an unloving father is Ginny's real problem. As Mrs. Stamper claims when Bud stomps off without finishing his breakfast, "neither of my children get any real nourishment". So Ginny's nymphomania is interpretable in Freudian terms. Later, at the New Year's party the suggestion becomes more explicit. Drunk, Ginny tries to show her father affection (much as Cal does in *East of Eden*) he rejects her, and she goes off in search of stray wolves instead. The film constantly implies that Ginny's promiscuity is less regrettable than the psychological dilemma which induces it. Hers is a sad case, not a shameful one.

Both Ginny and Deanie love Bud. When Bud tries to prevent Ginny leaving with a married man, she slaps him, repents, strokes his face, and warns him affectionately: "If you wanta listen to Dad, go

1. Inge is full of good bad girls, and bad-good girls, whether it be Marie in Come Back, Little Sheba who hides her boyfriend Turk (what a superb name for an athletic lover—Inge has a talent for the apt name) in her room at night, but is innocence in her landlady's eyes, Rosemary in Picnic who wouldn't mind being bad, or Cherie of Bus Stop.

"That's what happens to girls who go wild and boy crazy..."

"Now don't disappoint me, son. Don't disappoint me."

ahead. One of these days you'll find out. You'll find out, and then God help you". And when Deanie, slightly off balance, decides at last to have intercourse with Bud (which he rejects) it is Ginny's song she is singing ("Everybody's wild about Mabel"). But one doesn't have to anticipate. The resemblance between Deanie and Ginnie is confirmed by a beautiful close-up shot of the two girls side by side on a couch. The likeness is so clear it would be mule-headed not to draw the conclusion that Ginnie and Deanie are at heart very much alike.

Then Ginnie and boyfriend snuggle up close under a rug and presumably have intercourse, while Bud takes Deanie outside to watch the oil pumps pumping. "All this will be yours someday", he says. He means wealth, and that makes the statement ironic. The shot also means sex, and that's a double irony. Sex and money are inseparable in *Splendour*.

But at the decadent New Year's party which follows, shocked at finding his sister drunkenly flirting in the back of a car with one of the aforementioned stray wolves (1), Bud becomes involved in a beating up. As he drives Deanie home it becomes apparent his attitude has changed: maybe he doesn't want to "ruin" Deanie and get her in the kind of mess Ginnie's in.

His course of action is to avoid Deanie, and soon he collapses at a basketball match. Critics tell us that normally adjusted young men don't faint from frustration. I thought Bud fainted from pneumonia, but even if frustration were behind the breakdown, why should I have the presumption to throw cold water over anything outside my own experience? (2) Afterwards, Bud tries to explain his sex problems to his doctor, and the difficulty of communication between the two generations is sketched in sparingly but tellingly. In the background a nurse lurks disapprovingly while the doctor pauses uneasily with obvious embarrassment, emerging at length with: "I don't know how to advise you, Bud".

For Bud, the only recourse is to take some advice Ace once gave him and search after one of those other kind of girls (an available red-head named Juanita). With her classmates snickering behind, Deanie bravely enters her schoolroom. Her teacher picks on her to explain Wordsworth's "Ode to Intimations of Immortality"—"Well... when we're young we look at things very idealistically, I guess. And I think Wordsworth means that, that when we grow up that we have to forget the ideals of youth and find strength—" Deanie too realises that for her the splendour has died, and she rushes from the classroom to sink into a nervous depression.

"Allez vous en," says the young lady in the movie, "I shall find another teacher," while Bud's friend asks if he may take Deanie out. Bud doesn't stop him. In the meantime Deanie has lopped off her hair, the first sign that she wants to grow up and move away from parental influence. Bud's friend takes Deanie to a dance, but it is Bud with whom she is concerned. By now she is determined to ignore her mother's warnings, but Bud is less sure, and when he refuses the invitation of a vacant car she rushes to the waterfall and throws herself into the lake above in one of the most beautiful and surrealist scenes of the film. Here, in obvious contrast to the earlier, rather frantic, symbolism when Bud and Juanita plunged naked into the fall, it is as if Deanie is surrounded by love. It is an elaborate womb *and* phallic symbol, a kind of masturbation, the return to death in eroticism.(1) Deep, dark greens reflect the inverted image of Deanie's

1. Not because promiscuity upsets him, but because his sister is obviously being cheapened.
2. In a television interview last year, Kazan claimed that Inge based the plot on an actual incident in the lives of two of the school acquaintances.

1. "Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither,
Can in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore".
Wordsworth:
ODE TO INTEMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY

"There is a parallel in Splendour in the Grass *between the collapse of the old moral order of absolute puritanism (i.e. sex equals sin) and the collapse of an economic order which is also contained in the film. The two are felt by William Inge to be related phenomena. In the last five minutes the author makes the point that the important thing in living is to find out who you are and live by your own lights: neither to follow a social attitude of success and ambition, an accepted social moral attitude, nor the strong demands of an authoritarian person such as your parents on you. You should accept your own nature and shape your life from it. I think the notable thing in* Splendour in the Grass *is that at the end of it the author says 'I forgive my parents'"* ELIA KAZAN, *in Films and Filming, March* 1962.

rescuers rushing to her alongside the lake as heady music and Deanie's bliss as she murmurs Bud's name express utmost contentment and rest. Deanie is rescued against her will, the music dies away, the sound of the falls re-emerges, and the dream, the hallucination, vanishes. Earlier, to a milder degree, Deanie realised a similar pleasure in the bath tub, ruined when her mother questioned too closely ("Did he—Did he spoil you?").

Deanie is sent to an asylum, and Bud to Yale. And time passes, and the shadows of the film deepen and lengthen for Bud as financial crisis, the Wall Street crash, approaches. Deanie meets a doctor undergoing treatment at the asylum, too, but she is in Bud's thoughts still: as she sits rocking in a chair, the image dissolves slowly and precisely to Bud. The day Deanie's parents visit her Father is pushed to one side, and Mom does all the talking, while her hat blends visually with an ugly flower pot behind her head. And Deanie explains to her psychiatrist afterwards: ". . . Mom kept calling me her baby and dad kept calling me his little girl. Dr. Judd, don't they realise I'm me?" And the psychiatrist explains: "You know we blame our parents for everything these days. You've gotta remember they had parents too".

Deanie leaves the hospital, tries to see Bud again, and the film moves to its conclusion, a brilliant cinematic confidence trick, which plays upon our pre-knowledge of cinematic styles to force us to anticipate a happy end. Three old schoolfriends call on Deanie, and Mrs. Loomis warns them not to tell where Bud is leaving, a frustrating plan for us. At length, however, Mr. Loomis tells his daughter Bud is living at his father's old ranch, and Deanie drives out on a sunny day in a white dress. The reconciliation is set. Bud confronts Deanie at the end of a long path enclosed by hedges, and we know from all we know that Deanie will run up to Bud and they will live happy ever after. She runs. But then something goes wrong (as we feared, but hoped against). He's inviting her to meet his family. Family? The words don't quite register with us (except that simultaneously we guess he married the Italian waitress he met at Yale, but hope we're wrong) or to Deanie. Cut to the car: "And she didn't even know he was married" says one of the schoolfriends. Neither did we. Inside the house Deanie is on the defensive, and both husband and wife regard her with something like pity and resignation as she fondles their child. (Hell's bells! You'd think this was laying it on a bit too thick, but it works). As Deanie leaves, she makes the throwaway statement that she is to marry her doctor friend. It is a defence, something of a guarantee against absolute humility: "I think you might like him"—an indefinite implication that the doctor is something to be held up for Bud's approval whom she really loves. Even as Deanie returns to the car, there's a faint glimmer of hope. Bud calls her back, but only to say: "It's awful good to see you again". And Deanie drives away through the now disused and derelict pumps, symbol once of good things to come.

The film ends with Wordsworth, a perfect realisation of the moral of the need for a "philosophic mind" when circumstances demand (to be compared with the choice in *Breathless* between "grief or nothing"). While Deanie broods on this, Bud returns to the house and kisses his sad little Italian wife. Again the implication is compromise. There is nothing to be done.

Splendour has a density, a strong dramatic hold, rarely encountered in the best of cinema. Both the screenplay by William Inge and Kazan's direction complement each other perfectly. Inge's dialogue takes on a new maturity, a greater feel for natural speech, a step away from the theatrical tradition, in this his first screenplay—a progress maintained in his screen adaptation of James Leo Herlihy's novel *All Fall Down*. The action of *Splendour* while set in the late twenties, is set in no man's time. Inge has brought to modern terms the classic dramatic theme of the crystallisation of personal disaster within wider social movements.

Superficially, the film's moral may seem close in spirit to Philip Dunne's *Blue Jeans* (based on the play by James Leo Herlihy and William Noble). Both were tremendous teenage pop movies, both adopt the attitude that experience reaps a more mature and philosophical attitude to life: the end of childhood theme. But comparison reveals the strength of Inge's work which exalts individualism, against *Blue Jeans*' case for determinism. Simply, the difference is this: the mistake in *Blue Jeans* is for the children to have intercourse (which is against the code), and the remainder of the film is devoted to the correction of the consequences of this original mistake. In *Splendour* the case for love over the demands of bourgeois prudery is a strong one: the mistake is *not* to have had intercourse, not to fly in the face of parental approval, and the result is individual unhappiness to which only a philosophic outlook may bring some comfort. This is so much more profound than the so-called philosophic outlook of the kids in *Blue Jeans*, happy ever after, though no one jot or tittle more psychologically mature than when the film started. *Splendour* treats its audience with more respect.

Of course, one could argue that if Deanie and Bud *had* slept together, then the result would have been precisely the same as in *Blue Jeans*—a simple adjustment to the social code. But this is to ignore another

1. Although in many ways **Splendour** is a logical sequel, a more mature and confident re-appraisal of themes developed in **The Dark at the Top of the Stairs.**

strength of *Splendour*, and one which justifies completely its intense eroticism. For although the characters in *Blue Jeans* sleep together we are given no overriding reason, apart from the demands of the script and the strength of the performances by Brandon de Wilde and Carol Lynley. We are forced to accept the relationship at its face value (again determinism). In contrast the eroticism of *Splendour* is so intense that Deanie's and Bud's strength of will in not sleeping together seems quite considerable. Only the irony is that they are being stubborn to obey their parents, and thereby leading to their own disaster—i.e. strength of will is all right, but it is better when it isn't used to obey somebody else's moral code. Deanie has only the strength to be individualist for her own purposes halfway through (although she seems prepared to give way out of love for Bud soon after her mother's lecture in Reel 1), and then Bud still hasn't learned the lesson (admittedly, partly out of consideration for Deanie). In fact, I'm not sure that Bud ever does learn in the same way that Deanie learns: he has most of his decisions made for him. His father goes broke and commits suicide, which makes it easier for him to turn to farming, and he marries the convenient Italian waitress rather than wait for Deanie (1).

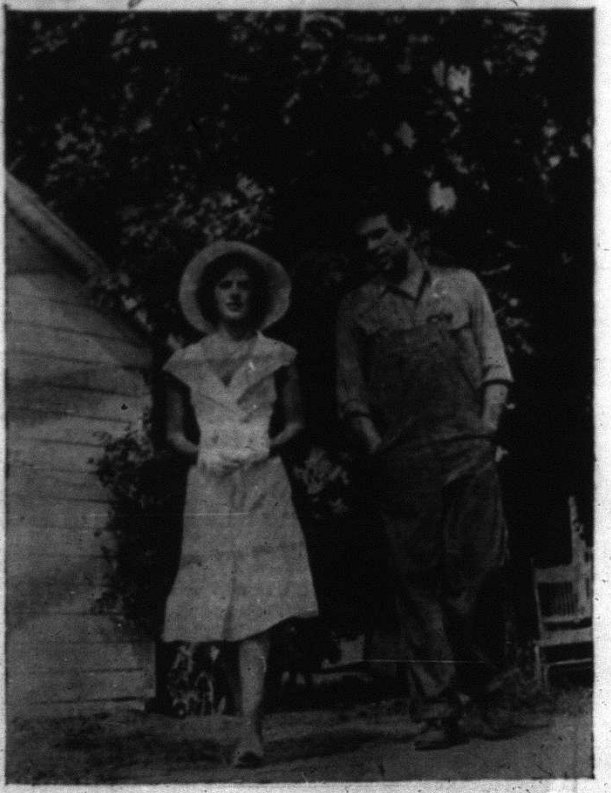
The strength of will exhibited by Deanie and (to a lesser degree) by Bud would be quite impossible for the children of *Blue Jeans* because their actions are determined by forces outside their control and because they look and for much of the time behave, like children.

In direction Kazan excels even his superb control of both image and performance in *Wild River*. The containment of individual crisis within wider catastrophe is implied without shifting from the problems of the individual. The individual case is seen as part of the whole, yet the whole is an external, unpreventable, circumstance. Thus the lengthening of the shadows across the principal's room when Bud explains his anxiety to leave Yale and take up farming foretell some kind of disaster outside Bud's control, yet of profound importance to his life. The New Year's party by its colour tones, its obscene sounding (trombone) music expresses a sour *fin de siecle* mood, while the blacks and reds of the night-club which Bud visits with his father shortly before Ace's suicide are the colours of imminent disaster (maybe our reaction works something like: black = death, red = blood, but also gaiety). Through out the film, every image is carefully constructed, and every dissolve, every cut, has a meaning.

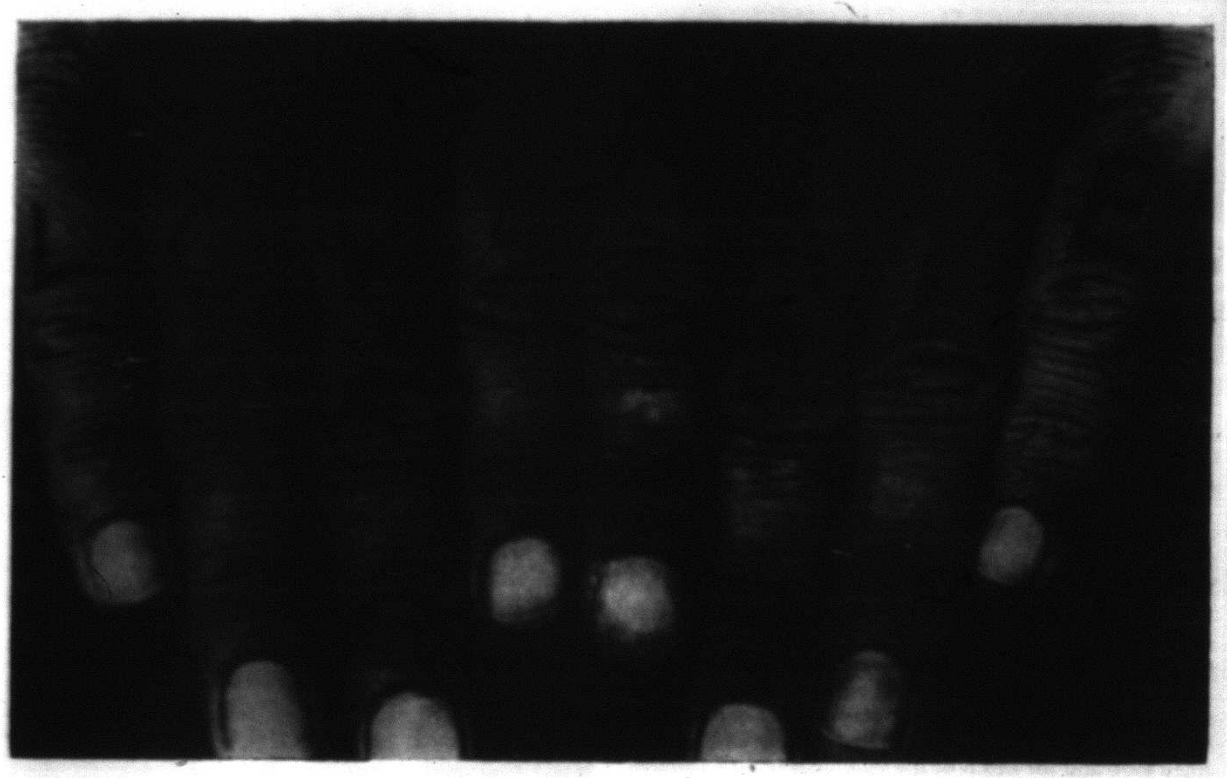
Much of the criticism of the film is that it is over-symbolic, is over-directed. In my view this is precisely what gives the film its remarkable quality, and great strength. It is lifted free from surface realism to the symbolism and exaggeration of the dream. Because reality is in practice larger than life, because reality actually lies in the subconscious interpretation of events rather than in matter-of-fact exterior behaviour, so paradoxically *Splendour* is even closer to reality than neo-realism itself.

1. However, to expect him to wait is pure romantic idealism on our part. It's the old trick of persuading the male members of the audience to fall temporarily in love with the leading lady, so that when the hero behaves foolishly they identify themselves as superheroes. Splendour in fact sustains its romanticism in a very pure form—even to the psychological commonplace that romantic love is born out of frustration.

"You're nuts about me, aren't you?"



"Well like you, Bud, I don't think too much about happiness either"



and a little child shall lead them

"It's really a nightmarish sort of Mother Goose tale we are telling . . . We tried to surround the children with the creatures they might have observed, and that might have seemed part of the dream. It was, in a way, a dream for them." CHARLES LAUGHTON.

BY IAN JOHNSON

THE NIGHT OF THE HUNTER, U.S.A. 1955. **A Paul Gregory** production distributed by United Artists. Directed by **Charles Laughton.** Screenplay by **James Agee,** based on the novel by **Davis Grubb.** Photography by **Stanley Cortez.** Edited by **Robert Golden.** Art director, **Hilyard Brown.** Music directed by **Walter Schumann.** 90 mins.

Preacher Harry Powell, **Robert Mitchum;** Willa Harper, **Shelley Winters;** Rachel, **Lillian Gish;** Icey, **Evelyn Varden;** Ben Harper, **Peter Graves;** John, **Billy Chaplin;** Pearl, **Sally Jane Bruce;** Birdie, **James Gleason;** Walt, **Don Beddoe;** Ruby, **Gloria Castillo.**

WE ARE children once more and the Devil may walk tonight. Shadows cast themselves in Gothic quadrangles, pools of darkness hold we know not What. A heavy chill envelopes deep mystery, things unexplained. Beautiful, ugly, wonderful things. There is much to be discovered.

A mother diety is in the heavens (Lillian Gish), and she gathers her children about her and warns of false prophets. We cast our eyes down upon the Earth and see preacher Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum) in his dark puritan garb and talking to the Lord — "but there are lots of things men do hate, Lord: perfumed things, lacey things: things with curly hair" and watching a girl dancer he rips the cloth of his pocket as he jerks open his flick knife with his HATE hand.

Preacher Harry Powell is a text-book example of the psychoanalyst's father-identifier: a resentment of women to whom he attributes sin and shame, a love of dark clothes, authoritarianism and fear of pleasure. The superego of preacher Harry Powell, insane, should be enshrined in a glass case for permanent reference.

These are dark days, days when little children must go begging, days of depression, when dark forces

ıay be abroad and when religious hysteria may take s most perverted shape. Ben Harper who has stolen ıat his children, John and Pearl, might eat is pur- ued by police. He hides the money with his children efore he is caught and struck down. The boy whimp- s "Don't, don't..."

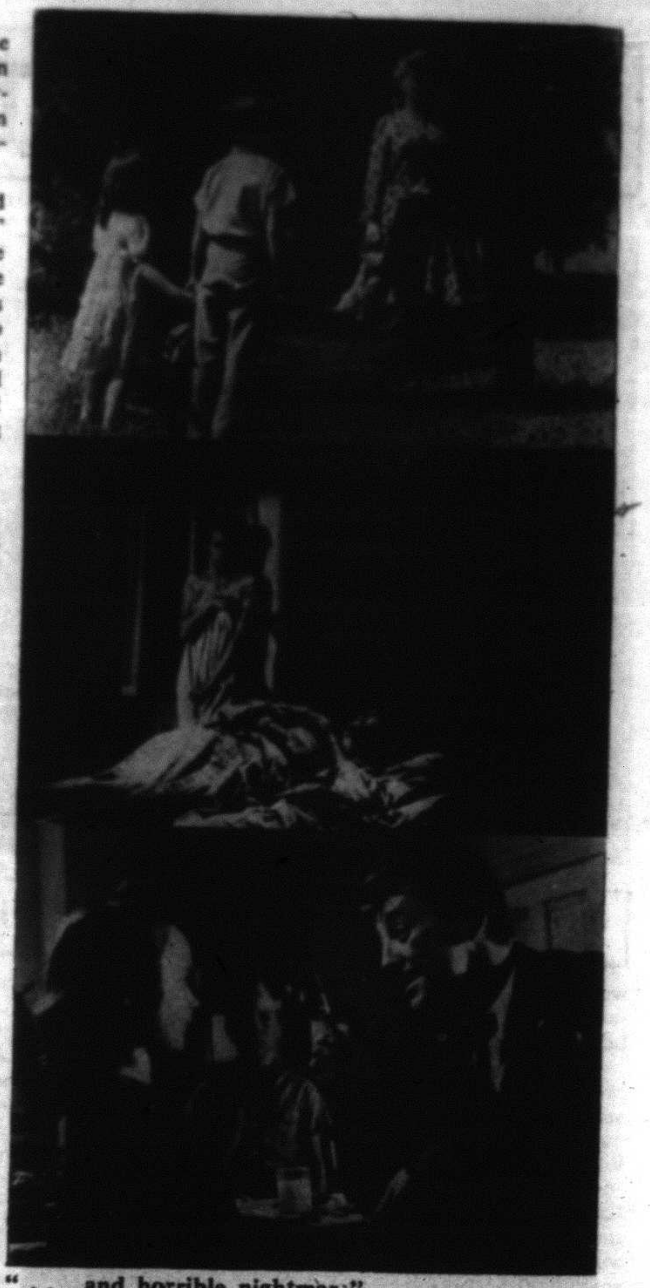
In prison, just before Harper's execution, Powell and larper meet. "A little child shall lead them..." ıurmurs Harper in his sleep, and Powell knows where e must seek. The words may also have significance n the lives of John and Pearl... One night John tells 'earl the story of the King who entrusted his son to uard his gold, "... and before long the bad man ame back and —" The shadow of Preacher Powell looms over the window blind, and beneath the street lamp he stands singing, "Leaning, Leaning, Leaning on the everlasting..."

The highly suggestible Mrs. Harper (Shelley Winters) meets Powell next day, and is given his lecture on the moral of his hands: "With this hand Cain struck the blow..." (the left hand)... The right hand is the hand of love with "veins running straight to the soul..." Mrs. Harper falls to the persuasions of the preacher and an interfering neighbour, and marries Powell. But on the wedding night Powell warns that Willa's body "was not meant for the lust of men...", and staring in the mirror at her woman's body Willa undergoes a conversion and begs of the Lord "Help me to get clean so as I can be as Harry wants me to be"...

Powell is seeking the money, unknown to Willa, hidden in Pearl's doll: "It's me she believes" says Powell to John, and that's true. But one night she finds John isn't lying when he claims Powell is seeking the money, and that is the night Willa dies. Powell twists his HATE hand in the light of the moon, before plunging his knife into Willa's body. And next day Uncle Birdie, the old man who helps John fish on the river, looking beneath the surface sees a strange sight. Willa erect in the car, her throat slit from ear to ear "like she had another mouth," and her hair drifting slowly and beautifully in the current.

Alone with the children, Powell's efforts are redoubled ("Speak boy, or I'll slit your throat and leave you to drip like a hog slung up at slaughterin' time") but becomes locked in the cellar himself ("Open that door you spawn of the Devil's own strumpet"). He escapes but just fails to reach the children as they drift away in the skiff. Under the stars Pearl sings. "One upon a time there was a pretty fly, He had a pretty wife, this pretty fly, But one day she flew away, flew away..." And the skiff drifts past tiny creatures: a frog, a spider web, rabbits, and seeds let loose into the air.

In time they drift to a shore and from a house comes the song: "Dream Little One, Dream... Dream, Little One, Dream. Though the hunter in the night fills your childish heart with fright. Fear is only a dream, so Dream Little One, Dream"... And John and Pearl climb into a stable with their doll, like Mary and Joseph, where cows with heavy udders stand. Later that night, when the moon has risen high, John wakes to see Powell crossing the horizon on his stolen horse, singing "Leaning..." Riding the night mare he looks like some demon, and one recalls his fondness for the moonlight, and his fright later at a cat. Is he the Devil?



"... and horrible nightmare"

Powell twists his HATE hand in the light of the moon, before plunging his knife into Willa's body.

At the sight of Powell John and Pearl return to the skiff, but as if by supernatural force it comes to rest only a little way downstream.

The children are discovered next morning by Rachel Cooper (Lillian Gish) "a strong tree with boughs for many birds to sing" who washes and scrubs them, whose farm is rich with the goodness of nature, and who like a hen and her chicks takes them to town next day. That night she tells the tale of Pharoah's daughter who found in the rushes — no not Pearl and John — but baby Moses. John gets confused and thinks there's two Pharoahs. At night Ruby the oldest girl in Rachel's care misses sewing classes and meets Powell. The eternal feminine (the music of Willa Harper is playing as a jazz version in the background) she falls for Powell, who having gleaned the information he wanted comes next day to the farm. But Rachel is not deceived, and Powell's tale of the hands ends with the wrong hand up. Frightened off with a shotgun, Powell threatens to return at night. And at night he stands singing "Leaning..." while Rachel sings the same hymn: "Leaning on Jesus..." An owl pounces and catches a rabbit: "It's a hard time for little things".

As the children shelter round Rachel she tells the story of Herod, and how Mary and Joseph ran away, and John thinks just like Pearl and John. Maybe the doll is little Jesus? Powell sneaks into the house, but as the children hustle upstairs a cat comes down, scares Powell, and Rachel lets off her shotgun almost immediately after, and Powell rushes to the stable. Next day, blinking in the sunlight, he is captured by the police, knocked down, and John cries "don't, don't" and throws him the money. "Dad, take it back" cries John, he never wanted it. So now John has two fathers, yet only one.

At the trial John refuses to give evidence, and the crowd led by the sycophantic Mrs Spoon who once had been so kind to Powell yells "Blubeard", and storms the street like a witch hunt, and Powell becomes a thing of insignificance against this new terror, the lynch mob.

But it is Christmas and a time for gifts. And John who has nothing to give his new mother, finds an apple, and "that's the richest gift a body could have". In return John gets a watch, which is what he had always wanted. "It's the best watch I've ever had", he says. "Can't have a fellow going around with a busted and run down ol' thing" agrees Rachel. And lovingly: "they abide... and endure".

The Night of the Hunter is a strange and wonderful film. Strongly rooted in the psychological, it is both beautiful dream and horrible nightmare. In its poetry of vision and sound, in its theme, in its love for the rural, it is Scandinavian. It is a mixture of myth, religion, and demonology. Gish is the mother, the Roman Catholic church, the feminine, love, God, and the gift. Mitchum is the father, Puritanism, male, the Devil, evil, and take. It is snatches of memories, halves of unlearned tales, hints of superstition. It is exaggerated shadows and depths of the unknown. It is a childhood dream.

'LOVE AND HATE' MAN ESCAPES

A prisoner with the word "love" tattooed on one hand and "hate" tattooed on the other was being hunted early today after escaping from a Dartmoor working party with another prisoner.

Daily Express (Dec. 1962)

GIVE: SYMPATHISE: CONTROL

Bresson's Joan of Arc

BERGMAN / BRESSON / BUNUEL By Geoffrey Thurley

Artificial as it may seem to link three artists each as unique and powerful in his own right, Bergman, Bresson and Bunuel have more than their stature in common. In their moral weight and seriousness, they reveal the Christianity which formed them; they pose those questions which religion exists to answer; in their divergent responses they span the European tradition, culturally as well as geographically. Their basically ascetic moral compulsiveness has kept them from that tendency to soften into mush and disintegrate into carelessness characterising the career of other directors without their moral drive — principal victims being de Sica, Cocteau, Renoir, Antonioni, Fellini and, almost en bloc, the New Wave.

Of the trio Bergman is at once the least relaxed and the most inclined to sprawl and gush. But a persisting adolescent restlessness preserves even his weaker philosophical charades from being as embarrassing as they could be. It is hard to imagine a more naive discussion of the ultimate things than *The Seventh Seal*, for example. Yet the naiveté that can still find the symbolism of the game of chess interesting is also capable of communicating tension even through this outworn allegory. The metallic elegance of Swedish civilisation is ominous precisely because it seems so thinly chromium-plated onto a troubled awareness of the inchoate and the destructiveness. The weakness of much of Bergman's thought originates is in its lack of a sophisticated philosophical tradition. But while more sophisticated cultures are driven to violent aesthetic extremes to find new expressions of their preoccupations, Bergman, in contrast with most European directors, is direct and straightforward.

His work is confused, at times having the shallow, brittle elegance of Welles's, at others (as in *So Close To Life* and *Port of Call*) as turgid as those heavy German moralities of the '20s and '30s that still masquerade as classics (e.g. *Pandora's Box*). Sometimes Bergman seems himself unsure of the real subjects of his films: does he really worry about the abstract existence of "God"? to what extent are the overt problems in his films merely the evidence of a still inarticulate angst? What, above all, does he really feel about love, sex, chastity, emotional relationships? This confused welter has Ingmar Bergman for its centre, and this self-renewing whirlpool generates the integrity of his art. Bergman is the least detached of all great directors. He is vulnerable to the sneers of "sophisticates" because he is honest.

Being a Swede, of course, Bergman is committed to the cult of the Swedish body, of carnal love, abandon on midsummer's eve, and the rest of it, fondly/nostalgically parodied by Bergman himself in *Smiles of a Summer Night*. Where they are not falsely Shakespearean (as with the servants) they are cold, those smiles; and basically these are the same characters — as if to emphasise the fact, the same players — as are hunted and haunted through his darker films.

Bergman's own attitude is anything but clear. With him, sex is associated primarily with shame — the concern with so special a sociological problem as that of unmarried mothers, is merely this obsessive guilt about sexuality projected into social terms, just as his fascination with abortions is its projection into Nature. The same distaste arises with the themes of the male's humiliation (the old man's in *Wild Strawberries*) and male sadism (the curiously feminoid actor in *Sawdust and Tinsel*).

Two "characters" recur. There is the stern ascetic, usually played by Max Von Sydow, with whom Bergman himself seems most closely to identify. And there is the elegant, cool-to-cold, witty, consul-type, usually played by Gunnar Bjornstrand. Von Sydow is the knight, the seeker-after-truth, soulful, pure, and brutal where necessary; perhaps his most essential quality is a basic incapacity for any kind of earthly happiness. In both men's make-up charity is conspicuous by its absence; in this they seem to typify the Bergman weltanschaung — and, perhaps the best in the Swedish character. Though the knight possesses a grim irony that might pass as a sense of humour, he is devoid of any relish for life; indeed, he begins to find peace and rest of a sort only at the very nadir of fortune, when circumstances force him to a teeth-gritting so intense as to turn slowly into a kind of smile. This dead set against charity — which is the one quality absent; or nearly absent, from Bergman— combined with the utmost rigour of integrity, is what gives his world its atmosphere of severe and arduous morality. He is obsessed with original sin or rather with original pain. So many of the most striking passages of his more intense films concern the infliction of pain. It is the Puritans who tell us the most about Hell. For Bergman, indeed, and perhaps for the Swedes as a nation, sex is fraught with pain; it is the wounding that appalls him, not the loathsomeness of carnal traffic itself, so abhorrent to, say, T. S. Eliot. This is particulary true of *Journey into Autumn*, in many ways his most terse and concrete treatment of an emotional relationship.

It contains two situations. The first involves a suave diplomat (Gunnar Bjornstrand) in attempts to pick up a young photographer's model and ends in an annihilating confrontation between the middle-aged man and his savagely estranged daughter. Her scornful discovery of the pick-up concealed in his bedroom is, perhaps, with its concision and intensity, perhaps the most shattering scene in Bergman's work. The victim here is the consul, for all his culpable vanity and aloofness.

The victim in the other episode is the middle-aged woman photographer (Eva Dahlbeck) who is trying to resuscitate an affair with an ex-lover. Her lover, though weak and hesitant, on the whole behaves kindly enough, so that her desolation is the more final. She is, in fact, almost the only character in Bergman's work to display any real charity; it is this that clinches the point of the film, and indicates the moral implied (perhaps unconsciously) in his work as a whole.

For sex without charity is bound to involve wounding and shame afterwards. It is nearly always the man who is the aggressor. One thinks of the Catholic nagger in *Wild Strawberries*, who drives his wife to the breaking point, and of the overt sadist in Bergman's script for Sjoberg's *Frenzy*. This whole preoccupation inevitably reaches its climax in the act that most obviously exemplifies the brutality of sex: the rape in *The Virgin Spring*. In Bergman the sex-war is the opposite of Strindberg. If Strindberg's final image of marriage is the woman getting a strait-jacket on the man, Bergman's is rape which is also, indeed, the apogee of sex without affection. Bergman himself seems sometimes hardly aware of this motif, so intent is he on the punishment that must follow.

ASHES TO ASHES: Silvia Pinal as Viridiana

Yet some of his most touching moments are the sudden revelation that the sadist is more pathetic — even, more sympathetic, than his victim. When the nagging husband at last gets his face publicly slapped by his long-suffering wife in *Wild Strawberries*, he cannot prevent his tears; our sympathy is wrenched abruptly from the tormented wife who has at least the consolation that right is on her side — to her tormentor in his deeper private hell.

The film's principal characters, the distinguished surgeon (Victor Sjostrom) and his son (Gunnar Bjornstrand) are both, in different ways, culpable: the son, by some innate aloofness, even fastidiousness, that suggests sexual inadequacy — Bergman is beautifully delicate in his refusal to give it too simple a name — the father, by a rigidly maintained egoism? remoteness? whose roots Bergman reveals as a pervasive hesitancy and lack of decision. Flashbacks — including one in which he is cuckolded by his cousin — reveal the mechanism of the old man's life — his pedantic selfishness masks his fear of humiliation.

Gunnar Bjornstrand — a Swedish Clifton Webb — also plays the lawyer Frederick Egerman in *Smiles of a Summer Night*. Here the dissatisfied husband, in an unconsummated marriage, visits his old mistress (Eva Dahlbeck), in whose boudoir he is surprised and humiliated by her current lover, a brutally virile Count. In the resolution of this film Eva Dahlbeck not only regains her old lover but also gives him — via humiliation and terror, both in the boudoir and in his game of "roulette" — a new self-respect, and her support and warmth. A similar office is filled by the old man's daughter-in-law in *Wild Strawberries*, who likewise has to make the running against a mate who is cold with fear rather than cold.

These two problems are causally related in Bergman; a fatal lack of charity in the male which in turn is rooted in fear; and the savage maiming of life when, without love, men and women couple. Yet the love — at least an attraction like love — *is* present, and is more than lust. The tragedy of love that is ashamed to live itself underlies the whole of Bergman's work.

Here one might be tempted to advocate some form of anti-puritanism. But one-word answers are always wrong — and run counter to the purpose of art. These blocks and blindnesses do not admit syllogistic resolutions; Bergman has delineated them, and in some places, notably in *Wild Strawberries* and *Journey into Autumn*, has prescribed and implied a warmth which could ensue on an understanding of these problems. That is all.

If, to put the matter schematically, the id (Eva Dahlbeck) is being misused by the ego (Gunnar Bjornstrand), which is in turn being punished by the superego (Max Von Sydow), the fault is the ego's, not the superego's. Although puritanism produces neuroses of its own, it is absurd to maintain that it produces the abuses to which it is in itself a horrified reaction. As Bergman reiterates, mere 'licence' as a cure is not only worse than the disease, but is the disease-behind-the-disease.

Robert Bresson's starkly Jansenist world is the polar opposite of Bergman's sunny Sweden. Whereas much of the pathos in Bergman's films derives from the contrast between the anxiety of the characters' inner space and the naive unremitting sunshine without, the spare shadowy interiors in which Bresson's characters spend most of their lives is an external equivalent of their inner isolation. In Bergman's films, the pain comes from our inability to co-exist without savaging each other. It is of the essence of Bresson, however, that his characters endure *alone*, either by choice or necessity, or the necessity of superchoice, grace.

This Bresson derives from a continuous literary and philosophical tradition, the absence of which accounts

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY: Francisco Rabal and Sylvia Pinal in Viridiana

for so much of Bergman's looseness and floundering. Pascal gave the classic statement of the essential aloneness in which most people exist. From the basically French capacity for reducing emotional experience to ideas comes Bresson's unity and economy. All his heroes are driven, by an idea which will not let them rest, to brave, and overcome, the particular Bresson predicament, of isolation and despair.

Both *Les Anges du Peché* and *Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne* tend to fade in recollection; they are at once too complicated and too thin. The complexity of the problems and the variety of characters involved, kept him from the remorseless concentration of his later films. Both have literary origins which impede their realisation; *Les Dames* is derived from Diderot via Cocteau, *Les Anges* is a scenario by Giraudoux. The derivation from Diderot is particularly significant, for it is the rationalism of the Encyclopaedists which so strongly colours that French tendency to reduce characters to ciphers in the author's cerebral calculus.

The real Bresson appears for the first time in *Le Journal d'Un Curé de Campagne*. Again, the literary origin is important: the angst-ridden world of French Catholic novelists — Bernanos, Mauriac, Bloy, etc. — is Bresson's natural element. But the exact balance of pain and grace suggests Kierkegaard. It is the first of the films to create a world that is the perfect correlative of the hero's inner conflict. The French countryside is as obdurate, cruel, remorseless as Hardy's; the people are as unfriendly: and to it all is opposed the young priest, an ingenu already half-devoured by cancer and existing on a diet of wine and bread.

In *Un Condamne A Mort S'est Echappé* Bresson again chooses a predicament of extreme isolation. The prison cell is indeed a Pascalian image, and Pascalian are the hero's contacts with his fellowmen — with the occasional shaft of charity and understanding lighting up deep night. Lt. Fontaine has not chosen his "profession" — of prisoner; but he makes it his vocation. Finding himself in his cell he manufactures his own world out of it. It is not just a question of getting out, but of constructing a — spiritual — way. Fontaine has discipline and intensity of purpose, in his extrovert practicality he is no less pure than the curé. The nature of this purity is illuminated best perhaps in the scene when Fontaine tells Jost, the young prisoner who is thrust into his cell after Fontaine's escape plans have reached a point of no return, that he has no choice in the matter. He must join Fontaine or be killed by him. It is part of Fontaine's philosophy that you must coerce circumstances or be coerced by them; it is the quality of the aspiration that determines whther this results in mere brutality or not. Jost is a young thug, a member of the corps of pro-Nazi French volunteers. Fontaine forces him through an experience he could undoubtedly never have aspired to alone. Fontaine saves him; Fontaine is his "grace that will not let me go."

The more purely existentialist implications of this thesis are elaborated in *Pickpocket*. Here the hero is a young intellectual, out of sympathy and contact with the working world, who embarks on an anti-social venture — picking pockets — in order to define himself more clearly. He is in fact a kind of Raskolnikov filtered through Camus. The literary derivation is a little too obvious. Yet the relative weakness of this

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film serves to make the point more urgently. Michel's venture, in fact, his choice of crime as vocation, is an attempt to impose order — on what? On the apparent order of the everyday working world, whose codes and regulations, give it a spurious harmony.

The professional pickpocket who teaches Michel his art had the integral unity of a man who has chosen to be what he is instead of letting "the apparent order" do the job for him. Yet is he not also at heart as much an object, as much a victim of himself, as the average bank-clerk? Bresson leaves us in doubt, he only registers what there is unusual and self-determined in this intelligent criminal, and what is only conditioning. Michel is in a different position: he has consciously chosen according to articulated ideas — ultimately to find anarchy at the heart; when he escapes from Paris and the police he embarks on a life of unorjginal sin and dissipation. Only when he ends up in prison does the thing seem to have come full circle. His final word to his girl — "What a strange way I have come to you" — brings the film to a natural conclusion.

Bresson's heroes are trying to make sense of neutral disorder, the uncreated moral void that is life. To do this, they need discipline, purity, earnestness. This inner striving towards order is revealed also in the economy of his films and the unity of action and idea. What they lack is easy to state and impossible to prescribe: a relish, enjoyment, passion for actual experience rather than for an ideal which will make sense of this experience. Again the temptation is to start bawling about "love of Life" to condemn Bresson as a life-hating masochist. And again anti-puritan slogans miss the point. Bresson's heroes strive to achieve order and calm, in the only way, ultimately, mankind can; by choosing to exist wholly and not in fragments of passion and perversion. This doesn't necessarily mean that asceticism is the only answer; it does mean that random physicality and self-indulgence destroy rather than fulfill. All we can do is to purify the source and then live according to ourselves.

The dangers of failing to purify the source before building shrines at the fountain-head are satirised in the work of Luis Bunuel. A Spanish Catholic who is honest is bound to be either a rebel like Unamuno, or, like Bunuel, an atheist, for Catholicism in Spain sharply demonstrates the absurdity of incantations about charity and love when everything around screams out for compassion — and screams unanswered. Bunuel's ruthless presentations of organised religion create sheer incredulity that such blindness can masquerade as virtue; it is like a notorious whore dressed up as a white bride. Time and again in Bunuel's work organised religion is also an image of human blindness and callousness.

This is very far from the adolescent ain't-I-awful atheism of Marlowe's "Faustus" and Brecht's "Mahagonny". In *Terre Sans Pain* the church is exposed as an overblown plaster facade criminally stuck on top of a population of beggars, and being painted and decorated every five years to boot, out of the alms it exacts from them. This criticism is not "Communist" in inspiration. I have no doubt at all that official Communism, in many of its present manifestations,

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would get very much the same treatment from Bunuel as he metes out to the Catholic Church. Nor is he simply begging Christ's, "The poor we shall have always with us". His beggars and cripples are symbols of a deeper, spiritual sickness, which, as in Dickens, is not only an effect of social injustice, but, in its turn, a cause. In *Terre Sans Pain* he builds up a frightening composite picture of dry bric-à-brac, through which fresh water keep welling up, only to trickle away among the stones. The people themselves are bric-à-brac, relics of humanity. The mere statement of a girl's age — she is fourteen and looks forty-five — shocks in a way unknown outside Bunuel. And at the back of it all, both mocked by the physical facts on the screen and yet in a strange way exalted by them, is Brahms' 4th Symphony, itself the monument of European culture over-blown, over-elaborate, yet serene, in spite of its plaster-scroll-work.

This juxtaposition of Brahms on the beggars means not that there is no longer meaning in beauty and order — but that the eye-shutting now needed to carry on an institution like the Spanish Church has become so preposterous an act of self-deception as to preclude any real spiritual harmony.

Bunuel performs his act of rejection in *L'Age d'Or*, the most schematic of his films, and the most deliberately unaesthetic. The sequence of the ideas in this film resembles that of Eliot's "The Waste Land". There is the same collocation of sexual impotence and social disintegration — or rather social ossification — what appalls Bunuel is the coagulation of the living spirit into ugly clots best symbolised by a massive dead institution like the Church. The climax of *L'Age d'Or* is the exasperated attempts of the hero and his girl to make love while a grandiose party is being brought to its head with a performance of Isolde's Liebestod. At the very orgasm of the music, the conductor breaks off, the players trail off into silences, the old maestro staggers down an *allée* to where the lovers are ludicrously struggling to get into position. The girl sees the old conductor holding his head in his hands, and deserts her would-be lover, who in fury finally throws all the cultural and social encumbrances which symbolise our stunted impotence right out of the window — a Christmas-tree, a plough, a priest. The house is consumed in a vandalistic fire — Bunuel's prophecy for Europe.

In *Les Olvidados* the spiritual stuntedness behind the facade works out its own savage conclusions; within the modern city, people live at a primitive level and impose their own rudimentary morality. Morality is chiefly represented by the foul blind musician, himself a vile lecher as ugly as anyone in the film, yet serving also as the Chorus of the action. His hoarse exultations when Jaibo, the young thug, is shot by the police are far more fearful a condemnation of life than Jaibo himself. Yet there is a kind of rightness about him; he represents public morality, with its blend of death-wish and loathing of anarchy. The final images of the film — the dust-heap upon which a young delinquent's body is tipped, and the pit into which Jaibo himself descends as he dies — are beyond description.

Bunuel's failures are many, yet hardly less impressive than his successes; to be so incapable of turning out a competent pot-boiler betrays an uncomfortable honesty. *Viridiana* almost alone of his later work reaches the level of *Los Olvidados*. The girl herself is the centre of interest; the church, though represented as usual, as blundering, is relatively unimportant. She *was* a nun, it is true, but here religion is more a symbol of human fear and self-defence as a whole rather than an evil in itself.

Sharing the central position with Viridiana is the bunch of beggars whom she "rescues" from destitution and sets up in her uncle's house. She is approaching her fate, bringing it upon herself by gradual denudings of her real motives. For what is the meaning of her charity? How many of the fine meanings of love are covered by it? In the end she is raped by them — as she deeply wanted to be. The beggars themselves are magnificently handled — a miracle of unselfconsciousness and naturalism. They are a familiar property of Bunuel, of course, inherited from the Spanish tradition —Velazquez comes to mind, and Goya, and Picasso, whose savage coolness Bunuel shares.

Where the rape in *Virgin Spring* was followed by purification and chastisement, this one drives the victim through the purifying fire she always feared, and therefore into the life she might otherwise never have known. Viridiana finally offers herself to her cousin — a simple enough sensualist — on the same terms as the housemaid. *Viridiana* is the work of a moral ascetic, like "Lady Chatterley's Lover".

Again, one returns to the same point at which panaceas offer themselves and yet again one must reject them for the *thing* itself, the experience of the work.

Viridiana's admission of the physical act of love is not random but on the contrary a deliberate choice a decision to give herself as she tried to do in her convent prostrations and in her philantropic acts.

In the greatest attempt of our time to comprehend the maladies of modern civilization, "The Waste Land" prescribes a three-fold cure: Give-Sympathise-Control. The final recommendation in *Viridiana* is: Give. The implied moral in Bergman is — Sympathise Bresson's examples preach — Control. Taken together they demonstrate the highest puritan response to the challenge of chaos.

PUNISHMENT: Bergman's The Seventh Seal

STANDING UP FOR JESUS

BY RAYMOND DURGNAT

The root cause of the critical condition of English film criticism is the old triple threat. Matthew Arnold outflanked the philistines by selling culture to the agnostic puritans as something next to cleanliness but more deeply interfused that rolls through all things. Since then a high moral purpose has become the homegrown equivalent of the deep symbolical meaning beloved of our Teutonic cousins; and D. H. Lawrence joins the Puritan's Committee of 100, along with John Calvin, John Knox, William Prynne and other founder-members of the Lady Chatterley fan-club. The second stab-in-the-back comes from the literature courses at university where 18-year-olds are required to turn out weekly essays in each of which they solemnly "evaluate" Wordsworth, Milton, Webster, etc., and often from the vantage-point of, society hopes, total virginity where sex, violence, death and even barrack-room camaraderie are concerned, discuss whether the "texture" of Fielding, Hardy or Baudelaire "reproduces the authentic density of lived experience". Not surprisingly the victims, who also have exams to worry about, study the critics and skim the texts, which are apt to be confusing. Nor are the disciplines of criticism furthered by the more dogmatic Leav(is)ites who by confusing democratic with demotic imagine that all culture is for all and that you don't need background knowledge to understand Shakespeare, Dante or "Finnegan's Wake". All it needs is the grandiose claim to be "objective" in one's aesthetic responses for a total collapse of criticism into a collection of schools which not only can't communicate, but can't even disagree without jeering.

The last twist of the knife is that as the Anglo-Saxon culture puritan braces himself against the temptation to relax in the opium-dens of light entertainment, he treats all entertainers and artists as putative drug-peddlers whose work has to be carefully scrutinised before it may be allowed to communicate. In fact, the more earnest a critic is, the more incapable he tends to become of seeing a moral or a meaning unless it's so crashingly simple that any artist above the level of hack would have thrown it away before he began. Hence English arty criticism noodles endlessly round foredoomed attempts to equate "good" style with "true" (i.e., good) attitudes to life and bad with bad. And, my word, there's plenty of bad — what that Satan gets up to! he's got that entertainment industry sewn up tight! Who but Screwtape could have inspired the virtuous Anglo-Saxon working man to

Above: director Richard Brooks seen rehearsing Jean Simmons and extras for **Elmer Gantry**

prefer entertainment to high seriousness, and pushpin to poetry.

THE ABSENT MINDED PROFESSOR

Deplorable as this preference may be, it's hardly as deplorable as the gulf which these cultural assumptions themselves created between the lowbrow public and the university-educated art world and artists. It's hardly as deplorable as the assumption that no man of good taste would prefer the joie de vivre implicit in B.B.'s b and bs to hearkening unto the Messianic wailing and moaning of T-for-Tiresias S. Eliot, O.M. And it's hardly as deplorable as the solemn charlatanry of the Hoggartites, who purport to survey the mass media and whine for censorship without a good word for Jerry Lewis, Bugs Bunny, "Mad", "Galaxy", Humph, Thelonious Monk, Bootsie and Snudge, singers like Eartha Kitt, Edith Piaf, Cleo Laine, songs like "September in the Rain" or "Tell Laura I Love Her", etc., and, to put it mildly, etc.

In a word the present generation of British left-wing intellectuals have never so much as dreamed of founding their cultural attitudes on left-wing attitudes, but have fallen hook, line and sinker for the petit bourgeois notions picked up in the sixth forms of grammar schools whose main purpose is still to segregate the white collar workers of tomorrow from those rough, swearing working-classes: notions fatally reinforced by thoughtless theories of "objectivity" popular at university, where adolescence inevitably seeks something which will combine the certainties of both science and religion while necessitating no discipline of one's own whims and prejudices.

.... AND SONS OF FLUBBER

To this tradition the reigning house at Dean St. is heir. That the best of intentions, and a sincere belief that their personal response were the absolute cat's whiskers, go with it, we do not deny, indeed, we are anxious to stress, nor are these attitudes peculiar to "Sight and Sound". Only in the writing of Peter John Dyer did they become so marked as to be unpleasant. Apparently incapable of using critical techniques so as to clarify, deepen, explore a film's meaning, he seemed, and seems, totally unaware that an artist is something more than an examinee being given a credit, a passmark or a whigging. When in one notorious article he applied the terms "exhibitionism", "obsessions", "consulting room horrors", "sexual fatality" to films by Bergman, Chabrol, Truffaut, Bolognini and Visconti, it become apparent that his main concern was to punish an artist for portraying (or having any sympathy for) the sort of weakness which (a) he, P.J.D., felt he was himself far above, and (b) which wasn't freely confessed in Surbitonian chit-chat. Had he said "These films upset me" or "I don't like these films" or "We don't wish to know that" or even "My experience of rape, murder, sexual perversity and consulting-room horrors is so wide that I know these films don't show what really goes on" we could have respected him, but his own delicate prudery consorts strangely with the trenchancy of his vocabulary. Anyway, as Peter John Dyer said of Ingmar Bergman, "As Ernest Bevin said of George Lansbury, "He's been a martyr carting his own faggots around quite long enough. It's time someone obliged with a match?" When a match was applied, in the pages of "Film", Mr. Dyer went up with a whoosh.

THE SAME OLD NEW STAGGERERS

But there is more than one strand of cultural tradition involved in the evolution of the Dean St. clique. Ever since the oft-lamented departure of Gavin Lambert, "Sight and Sound" has been a sort of pushmi-pullyou, with the editorial office straining to a sort of middle-of-the-road Lib-Lab culture, and the Red Flaggers tugging it towards notions of commitment in the narrowest and most puerile sense. Between 1955 and 1960 the paper had talked itself into misinterpreting and dismissing English and American films with something of the self-defeating bigotry which had characterized "L'Ecran Francais" in its Stalinist days. There were exceptions, of course: musicals — which can be enjoyed without having to sort out one's ideas (even here it was following a politique des auteurs laid down in the Gavin Lambert days — it missed "Give A Girl A Break" because it was directed by Donen who according to its theories was only Gene Kelly's sidekick). Anything by John Ford, even "Mogambo" with its difficult-to-obtain shots of gorillas was — well; one can't say that "The Wings of Eagles" is NOT a glorification of American militarism but then, there is something so healthy about all those open-air Westerns, isn't there? There's no connection, of course, between the individualism, the expansionism, the violence of the old-fashioned, pre-"Broken Arrow" Western and brinkmanship? no connection, in the American mind, between the bugles-and-flag ethos of the U.S. Cavalry and the U.S. Marines? or to come down to more recent times, no significance in the fact that John Ford lent his old Commie-baiting pal John Wayne a hand in cutting "The Alamo", where the Mexicans are undoubtedly the Communists and maybe the massacre is nuclear war? I'm not saying John Ford is a Fascist, I'm not saying he never made "The Grapes of Wrath" (21 years ago), I'm saying he's an American patriot and hardly anti-militarist. So why were S & S so upset over the spate of war films during the '50s? if John Ford can make "They Were Expendable", can't we all? To be "against" war films as such is fatuous unless you are also against (a) fighting Nazism and (b) fighting back in Korea. But the general public has never wanted war films which attributed some courage and dignity to the sacrifices which they made.

The first article I ever cut out for my scrapbook, in 1938, at the tender age of 5, was "Will the Bomber Always Get Through?" By the age of 8 I was sleeping through the Blitz, at the age of 12 the German atrocity stories were in full flood and Vansittart was saying "Geld the lot", at about 13ish I was being V-I'd and V-2'd, at the sophisticated age of 14 I saw the Belson shots in "The True Glory" (shown free and compulsory in schools), and the news of the first atomic bomb gave this avid s-f fan an eerie frisson. At 20 I was bayoneting straw men and enjoying the refined moral influence of the barrackroom (which was hardly coarser than

that of at least 3 of the schools I'd been to). So exactly how is the X certificate coarsening my sensibilities?

The truth is that there is no logic at all, either aesthetic or Socialist, in the "Sight and Sound" horror at war films. It's sheer Lansburyism, the pacifistic reflexes of middle-class "refinement", like its perpetual obeisance to censorship. What masquerades as vaguely leftish goodness is really middle-class fear of the brutal and licentious proletariat. Only today there is a still more specific subsection — working class youth.

The examples of committed criticism vouchsafed us in S & S (and for that matter "Definition") were depressing in the extreme. Lindsay Anderson sang a revivalist hymn, "Stand up, stand up for Jesus, Ye soldiers of the cross, Lift high his royal banner, It may not suffer loss," and sang it in close harmony with the Sons of the U.S. Cavalry.

One only wishes he hadn't also aspired to be the Sankey and Moody of film criticism, and it's not surprising that he got his ideological wires crossed in every one of his Free Cinema films which has any ideological significance. When at a rally of the Joint Council for Education Through Art a friend of mine rose and suggested that on the evidence of "Oh Dreamland" Mr. Anderson hated and despised the workers there was a good solid round of applause from the hall — in which I didn't join, but which I understood. As for "Every Day Except Christmas", Captain Anderson paints so glowing a picture of the jolly, hardworking British squaddie, always grumbling and rough with his tongue, but loyal at heart, so loyal that as he drives his lorry down the rolling English road he switches on the radio to listen to the Epilogue and God Save the King (or did we have a Queen already?), then, without a doubt, the Conservative government, the capitalist system and Fords of Dagenham, whose contented employees are currently bleeding them to death, have done the proletariat proud. All it needed was the Blessing of the Trucks by Father Karl Malden. Lindsay Anderson has produced at least one classic, "Thursday's Children", his Aldermaston film is deeply moving and we have a high opinion of "This Sporting Life". If the New Left hadn't been so sanctimonious about Free Cinema already we'd write an article in its praise. But while on the subject of Free Cinema, let's face it, "Nice Time" with its distaste for all those nasty X-certificate films was about as left-wing as a pep talk by Lord Hailsham. Even when Free Cinema got down to direct propaganda it could do so only by discreetly twisting social realities. "We Are the Dear Little Lambeth Boys" might have been subtitled "I Was A Teen-Age Little Lord Fauntleroy". At least it has like "Momma Don't Allow" the elementary merit of spoofing the toffs, but even Norman Wisdom films do that, and in any case MDA, while a fair enough picture of the "Fishmonger's Arms" isn't typical of the wider jazz movement, which was pushed just as hard by grammar school boys, as by working class youth, who, on the whole, preferred and still prefer those trashy pops (and don't come the old Acker with us, mate). I quite admit that it was a tour de force to get those earthy workers faces on the screen, more like them-

Above: INNOCENCE
Anthony Quinn, Yoko Tani.
The Savage Innocents

selves than they ever had been in those Grierson Instructionals, and that Free Cinema prepared Messrs. Reisz, Richardson et al. for the big break which they seized with both hands and of which they made splendid use. I still don't want to see those Free Cinema films unless I have to, and it's not because they're badly made but because I can see how neatly the directors have squared them with middle-class prejudices.

By and large, committed critics show very little interest in how accurately the films they criticize reflect society. They refer films to their own broad slogans, not to the realities which the films purport to reveal. Lindsay Anderson goes haring away after so idiosyncratic an interpretation of "On the Waterfront" that the next issue of S & S abounded in counter-interpretations (well, three, anyway); and one suspects that Mr. Anderson under the guise of attacking the last reel is really attacking the last reel but one in which Terry alias Elia turns stoolie and squeals to a certain Congressional Committee. His main criticism of the film is that if it had been truly Socialist it would have shown the dockers banding together to right their wrongs. But one of the disturbing features of the New York waterfront racket was the extent to which the men connived or were cowed into conniving with the union's attempt to keep the racketeers in power; in fact (after the film was finished) despite the efforts of an uncorrupt union, **and** of the government, **and** of the press, the men voted the corrupt officials back into power, where they remain. The points of detail which outraged Mr. Anderson were quite correct: there was not just **one** Mr. Big but many of them (the shipping companies), a Catholic priest did take a conspicuous part in exposing the racketeers. I suspect, though I don't know, that why Terry had to turn to the government was that if his fellow-workers had turned out to be noble savages and righted their wrongs for themselves, the film might have been seen by American audiences as yet another proof that there's never any need for government interference in industry. Terry has to face Friendly afterwards to prove to the dockers that he still is, and acted as, one of them; his sacrifice will, it is hoped, inspire them to become conscious of themselves as a class, to the solidarity which they haven't got. The film is not a study in Fascist leadership, but in martyrology — just like "Earth". Johnny is the audience — identification figure: "this is what **you** must do, you must stand up for Jesus." Why is the great gate so forbidding at the end? Because Kazan wants to remind us that the bosses are no more the dockers' friends than Johnny Friendly is, that work isn't always such fun as it is in "Every Day Except Christmas".

Undoubtedly there's a romantic streak in the film: I maintain there is a romantic streak in Mr. Anderson, but that wouldn't justify my calling him Fascist, disgustingly cynical, or even, really, deviationist. It would incidentally have been nice if someone on S & S had noticed that "Wild River" has an open justification of "Socialistic" planning.

Why do we bring up so old a criticism? Because examples of "social" criticism by "committed" critics have been so few and far between, and because this particular article established the New Left's tradition of denouncing films, not by reference to their actual social accuracies or inaccuracies, but by their relation to a set of dogmatic slogans about what left-wing orthodoxy was. To be sure, S & S ran an effort vaguely focusing on, yes, of course, what else is there, The Youth of Today, with its alarming Method acting, its evil motorcycling and rock 'n' roll, which Nannie Don't Allow (1).

IF IN DOUBT SLOGANISE

Even more depressing, though, is one's suspicion that even when our "committed" critics do have a direct acquaintance with social reality they sloganise everything into a caricature of itself. "Definition" ran a long article asking itself whether Flaherty wasn't a bit of a romantic really (no prizes offered for the correct answer) and characteristically it didn't do so by comparing (say) "Nanook of the North" with how Eskimos live, or "Moana" with how South Sea tribes live, but by comparison with theories elastic (i.e. vague) enough to cover all these forms of social organisation. Even more typical, alas, was an article on 'Look Back in Anger", where Stuart Hall argued that "The film is not about the sex-and-love life of the James T. Porters and the occasions when Jimmy threatens to bash Alison over the head far outweigh and outnumber the tight clinches"; and implied that the publicity still which implied that was a typical film industry lie. But the simplest spectator knows enough about Strindberg-type-love -hate to resolve this ludicrous dichotomy beween bashing and clinching — or they wouldn't be able to make head nor tail of David O's "Duel in the Sun". "The sexual and human

To Page 38→

(1) To this Sunday School atmosphere, Robert Vas, now departed, brought a welcome touch of reality.

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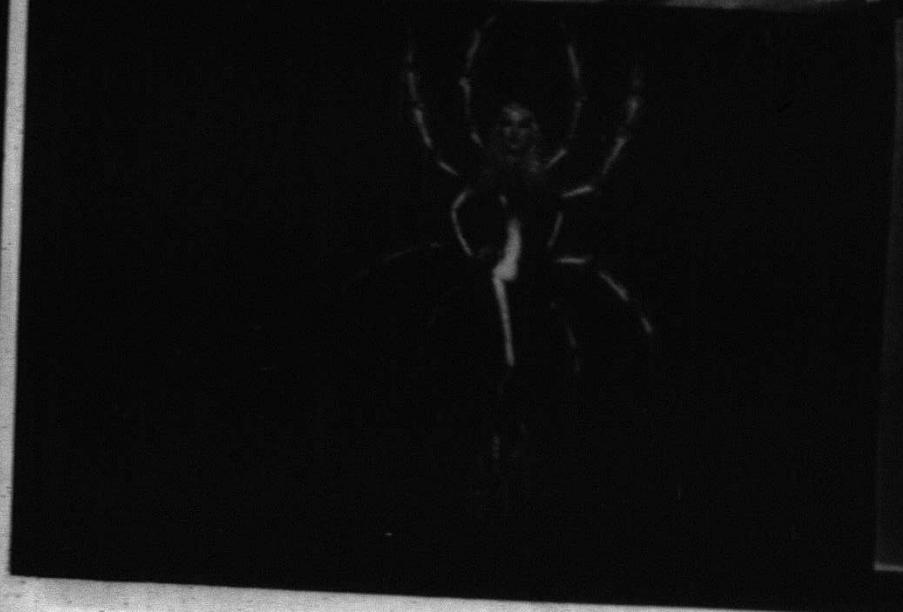
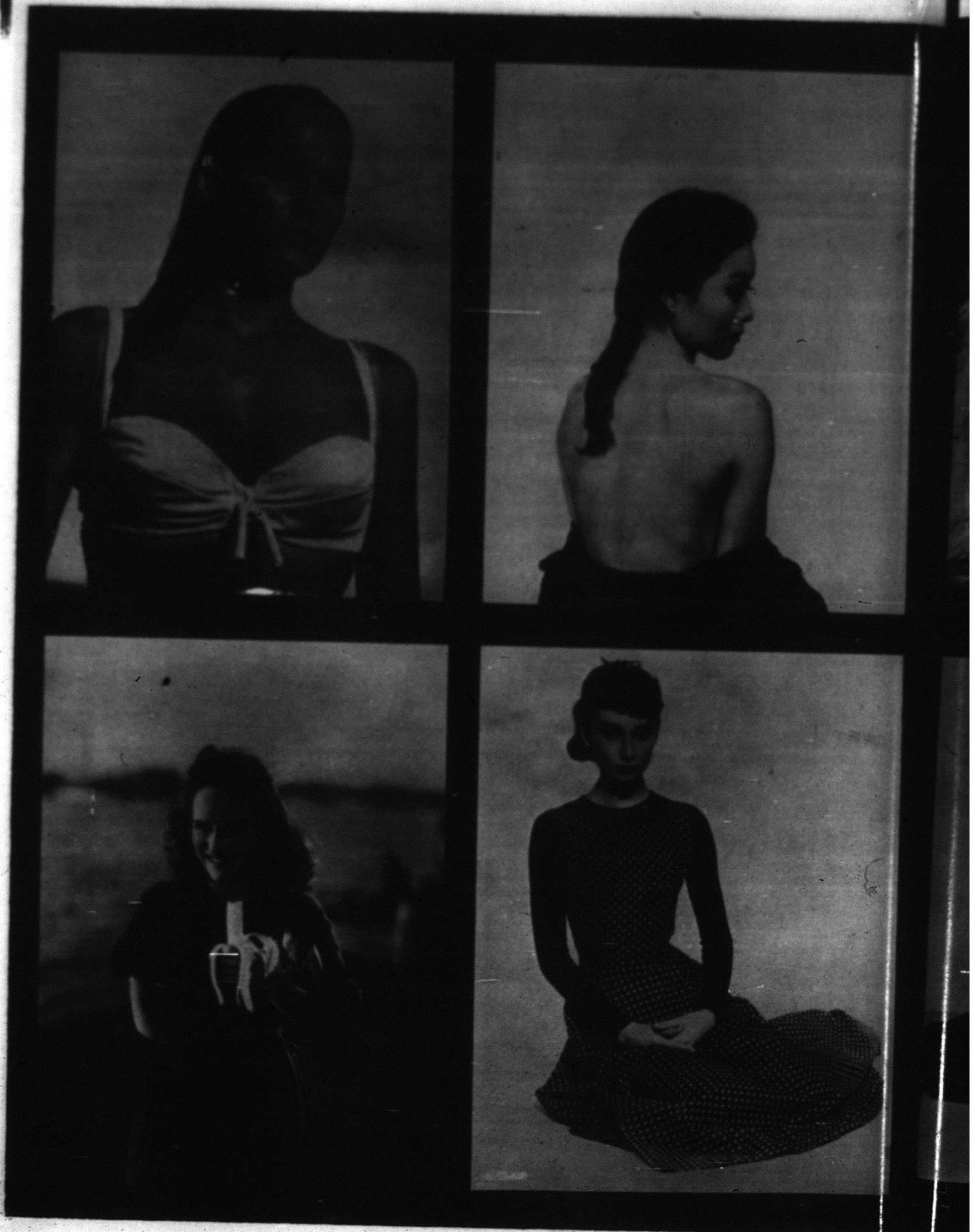
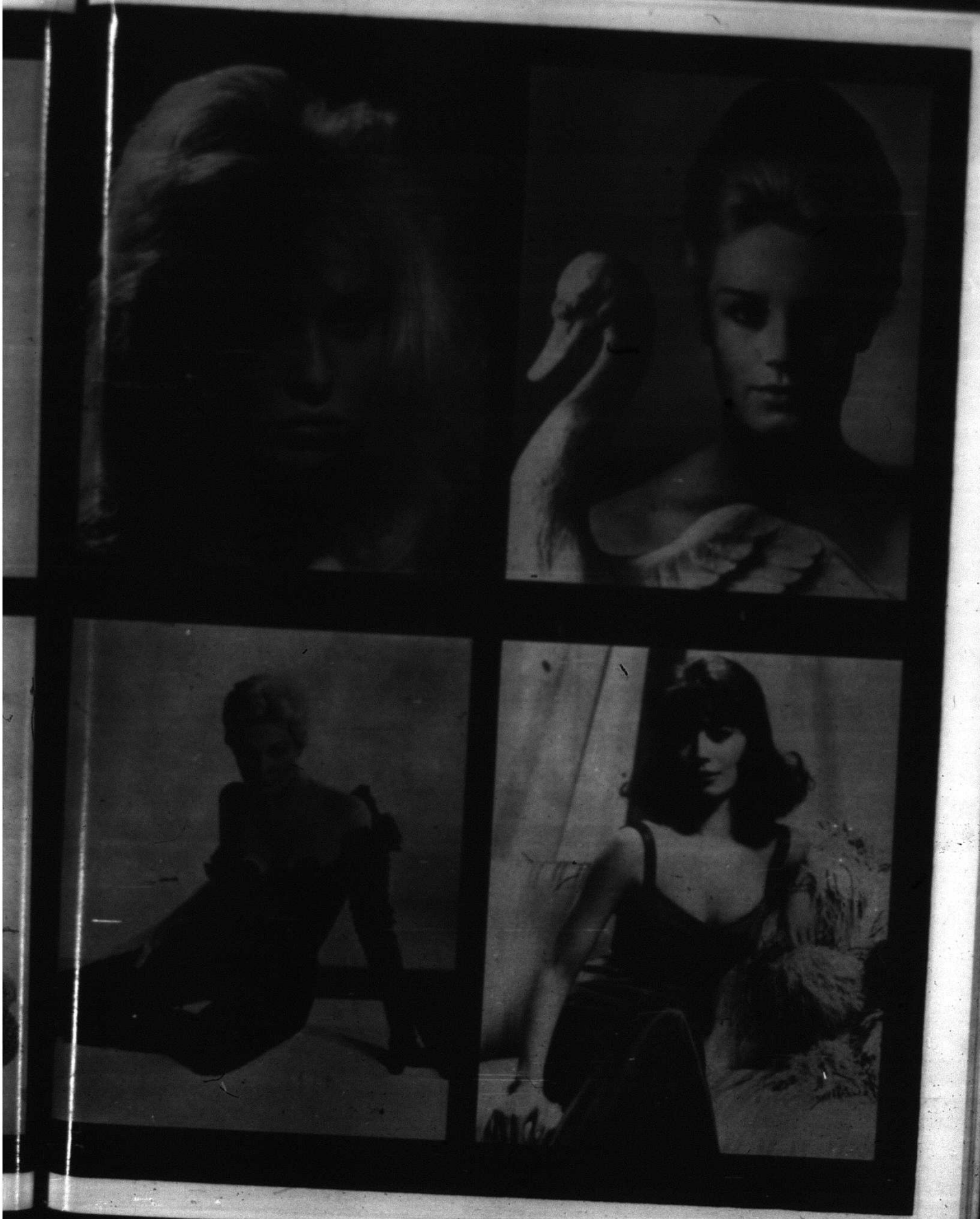






LA FEMME EST MAGIQUE!

PLYNE'S CRY in "Tirez Sur le Pianiste", the theme of this issue's feature

straddling of earth; or in Janet Leigh's white, child's face implacable in sweater, fur

Mylene's mouth and Mary Ure's; or on the

LA FEMME EST MAGIQUE!

PLYNE'S CRY in "Tirez Sur le Pianiste", the theme of this issue's 'cinematheque imaginaire', is symbolised on the **title page: Joan Bradshaw** finds **Huntz Hall** playing hard to get as soft fruits battle it out with a hubble-bubble in his mind; **Mae West** waits for someone to come up into her parlour and see her sometime; while the immortal **Marilyn** might be echoing Cagney's splendid manifesto from "White Heat"—'On top of the world, ma!'—in a publicity still confirming Pierre Kast's contention that the world is ripe for a matriarchal era.

Page 30 illustrates the four stages of love —flirtation, relaxation, intoxication, and the heavenly contentment of satisfaction. The last, a deathbed scene as passionate as few but King Vidor can contrive, lyricizes the spiritual equation, contentment=resignation =death, which makes of the male's exhaustion and the female's soft repletion, 'la petite mort'.

Page 31, four moods of a Goddess—rapacious, maternal, ecstatic and seductive. But supreme—whether clutching **Tyrone** in a composition which is a little masterpiece of bodily turbulence; or as a call-girl in Depression America, coolly taking her little son with her as she seeks out her lovers; or pointing those glam gams on cloth of silk in a spot of Mohammedan come-on; or, veiled-armed, floating like a mirage, ravishing 'in a wedding gown of cream chiffon over a crepe romaine slip, with Grecian lines peculiarly fitted to the burning Sahara'.

On **pages 32-33,** gowns, rags, jewels and flying-kit assert a lyrical eroticism all too rare currently, when catchpenny producers seem to have only one weapon, near-nudity, in their armoury. How much erotic pride, poetry and complicity blossom in these creations—in **Ava Gardner's** tragedy queen, in **Rita's** festive river of black satin, in **Hedy Lamarr's** truculent demonstration that her night has a thousand eyes, in **Marlene's** white cataract of fur, or in deMille's absurd fantasias of feathers, velvet and ninon voile, with a hint of drastic decolletage knowingly balanced by a roguish straddling of earth; or in **Janet Leigh's** white, child's face implacable in sweater, fur, heavy leather and flying helmet, hunted Diana of the jet age; or Gina's corsetted bust, padded sleeves, pearls and frills.

Pages 34—35 offer every man's dream harem. Eight pairs of eyes inquire their lord and master's choice tonight. But many a mere pin-up picture is a tantalising character-study. Here, **Ursula Andress's** Prussian scowl seems to be that of life itself, capable of outfacing even the eternal Dr. No, the fatal monk of "The Seventh Seal". **Paulette's** guttersnipe vivacity counterpoints the demure delicacy of **Audrey Hepburn,** waiting, a little frightened and very gentle. **Mylene,** a magnificent little lioness, is in complete contrast with **Mary Ure,** whose strong mouth and smoothly sledge-hammer glance give eerie depth to the white brow and Virginia Woolfine ethereality. While Audrey clasps her hands quietly between her flamingo-slim legs, **Kim** sprawls akwardly, with an overbrimming goodwill, eager sphinx imposing her elegantly massive body; and **Natalie Wood** seems to loiter in a '20s indecision, calmly provocative, but not really at ease, the smile contradicted by the enquiring eyes.

Opposite. Four gruesome twosomes comprise our last little gallery, of oddballs and weirdies. Having blackmailed proud **Maria Felix** into submitting to his loathsome advances, **Jean Servais** prepares to receive her with an array of the monks' robes and ecclesiastical props that feature in his fantasies. But in this moment of brutality their hidden affinities burst free, and she gives herself avidly to her tormentor. Meanwhile, **Francoise Prevost** nourishes her Lesbian passion for the girl with the golden eyes, and virile **Hildegarde Neff** sits like an idealistic Teutonic knight being clad for battle by his faithful page. And while **Tony Curtis** in his bubble-bath seems about to giggle 'Oooh, it tickles', **Marilyn** broods . . .

PAGE 29: Joan Bradshaw & Huntz Hall, from "Looking for Danger" (1958, Warner-Pathe); Mae West, from "I'm No Angel" ("It Ain't No Sin. 1934, Paramount); Marilyn Monroe (1952. Fox).

PAGE 30: Albert Préjean & Pola Illery, from "Sous Les Toits de Paris" (1929), courtesy 'Films &Filming'; and (all Paramount) Tab Hunter & Sophia Loren from "That Kind of Woman" (1959), Marisa Pavan&Burt Lancaster, from "The Rose Tattoo" (1955), Mel Ferrer & Audrey Hepburn, from "War and Peace" (1955-6).

PAGE 31: Marlene Dietrich: with Tyrone Power "Witness for the Prosecution" (1957, U.A.); in von Sternberg's "Blonde Venus" (1932, Paramount); in Richard Bolaslewski's "The Garden of Allah" (1936, Selznick); and "Kismet" (1944, M.G.M.).

PAGE 32: Ava Gardner, from "The Naked Maja" (1959, M.G.M.); Marlene in night-club attire; Rita Hayworth, from "Gilda" (1946, Columbia); Hedy Lamarr, from "Samson and Delilah" (1959, Paramount).

PAGE 33: (Probably) Kay Johnson & Lillian Roth, from de Mille's "Madame Satan" (1930, M.G.M.); Gina Lollobrigida, from "Crossed Swords (1954, U.A.); Gene Tierney, from "Tobacco Road" (1944, Fox); Janet Leigh, from von Sternberg's "Jet Pilot" (released 1957, R.K.O.)

PAGE 34: Ursula Andress, from "Dr. No" (1962, U.A.); Nobu McCarthy, from "Walk Like a Dragon" (1960, Paramount); Paulette Goddard, from "Modern Times" (1936, U.A.); Audrey Hepburn (1954, Paramount).

PAGE 35: Portraits of Mylene Demongeot (c1962, Rank); Mary Ure (1962, Warner-Pathe); Kim Novak (1957, Columbia); and Natalie Wood (1962, Warner-Pathe).

PAGE 36: Jean Servais & Maria Felix, from "La Fièvre Monte à El Pao" ("Republic of Sin", 1959, Gala); Francoise Prevost & Marie Laforet, from "La Fille aux Yeux d'Or" (1961, Comp.on-Cameo); Hildegarde Neff & Dany Robin, from "La Fete à Henriette' (Cameo-Poly); and Marilyn Monroe & Tony Curtis off-screen during "Some Like It Hot" (1959, U.A.).

STAND UP

From page 28

relationship between Jimmy and Alison is a metaphor for the social relationship between Jimmy and the world." By "world" Mr. Hall presumably means the upper-middle-class ethos, which must of course have weighed pretty heavily on Jimmy down in the market-place sweet-stall. But if we rule out the love-story, what are the social significances of Helen and Cliff? what class significance can Mr. Hall find for such little details as the fact that Jimmy is more contented with Helena than with Alison but loves Alison more than Helena? Of course the film is about class and of course Mr. Hall is justified in reacting when critics try to dismiss a play or film because they don't like its protagonists (a fault from which left-wing criticism is hardly immune). But Mr. Hall seems to grudge the film its non-political meanings. The still which said "Look Back In Anger" was a love story was absolutely right. One reason why "Look Back In Anger" was the best English film since goodness knows when (and maybe still is, though we don't claim to have seen every English film made since goodness knows when — we mean this like other critics decide on the Ten Best Films Of All Time), it's because it frankly admits that Porter is his own co-executioner (with society) and that one of the obstacles to his finding a cause to fight for is the closed-shop insularity of the English working-classes. It is because the film has all sorts of themes, political, social, emotional, that it is so splendid and true. Not that it hasn't a snide defeatist streak — Alison's miscarriage brings it within the atmosphere of gynaecological moralising accepted by Schlesinger and quietly left ambiguous by Reisz — while like Celia Johnson and Alan Bates our old friend Mr. Porter sees the moral light on a railway station, which is nothing to do with nationalisation (Enter Dr. Beeching, pursued by a diesel). It's a thousand pities that since "The Entertainer" Osborne himself has capitulated to the left-wing moralists and produced a thin and sour strip-cartoon ("Paul Slickey") and a thin and solemn one ("Luther"), as if bidding for the title of the neurasthenics' Al Capp (The second play does have the merit of a timid return to ethical complexity; it goes without saying that we like "Under Plain Cover" better than the B feature). But the reader can see why we have looped our way from criticism criticism into film criticism. The "chastening" of all our working-class heroes by the desire for affluence (Heather Sears, Shirley Ann Field), by the equation of working-class wisdom with fundamentalist moralising ("Right's right and wrong's wrong and all this tones-of-grey nonsense is self-indulgence" as the Peggy Mount surrogate booms in "A Kind of Loving"), and by a private stoicism and loyalty (Jimmy Porter) all this is the artists' *honest* acknowledgement of the bankruptcy of Socialist-puritan fundamentalism in our period when the working-class is being (relatively) emancipated. The New Left's sudden recrudescence of hymn-singing, its desperate attempts to reduce Osborne's play to the pious simplicities of a Wayside Pulpit are just what they seem; a regressive revivalism.

For the same reason committed critics relish the flags and bugles of a Ford picture while shuddering at the truly contemporary bitterness of "Run of the Arrow". It is the committed critics who are unable to grasp that Ray's films are worth noticing carefully not only because of their plastic language but because of their concern with man in society ("Rebel Without A Cause", "The Savage Innocents"). Just because of their intellectual fundamentalism they are constantly attacking, despising, ignoring film-makers who in some ways at least are on their own side (e.g. 'On The Waterfront', 'Kiss Me Deadly', 'La Loi', On the Beach', 'En Cas de Malheur', 'Notte Brava', all Losey's British films until 'The Criminal').

The only way one can tackle the issue of commitment, or even clarify the disagreements, is by starting from the ground up, e.g. what is culture for anyway? has it a moral duty to be propaganda, or is it highbrow beer-and-skittles, or is it anti-propoganda in the name of that refractory thing, human nature, or what, or all four together or at different times, and if so, when is it which? Maybe Socialists should make a point of seeing films which view the world through Tory eyes? maybe their opponents have some useful things to teach them? Why shouldn't Socialists be interested in, and sympathetic to, Tory or Fascist or Buddhist or Eskimo artworks for the same reasons that we hope Catholics are interested in Protestant films or modern democrats in Elizabethan drama or the Tories in what we think? Why shouldn't Socialists say to one another or to the world at large, "Do go and see "Triumph of the Will" again and again and again, you've never seen such a persuasive account of Fascist idealism, now at last we can really feel Fascism from the inside?" Ergo, "Triumph of the Will" is a great film — whether your interest in it is one of "Quicquid agunt homines", of "There, but for the grace of God, go I" or of psychological espionage or self-enlightenment. There is our attitude, we may be wrong, but instead of discussing issues S & S promptly took refuge in a smokescreen of insults ("cultural gauleiters") and Bloomsbury woolliness. "The governing characteristic of English critical writing, seems to be its empiricism, its innate distrust of theory, and reluctance to draw dividing lines." But the governing characteristic of Dean St. critical writing is that it never sees the necessity of theorising because it hasn't yet grasped that attitudes other than its own merit the courtesy of consideration.

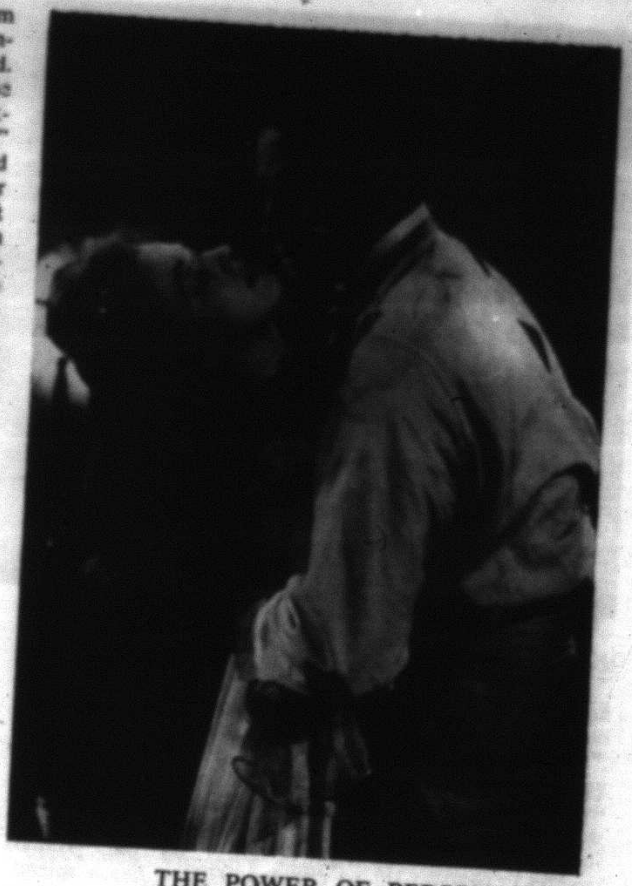
THE CASE OF THE BLOODSTAINED BATHTUB

Faced with the challenge of new ideas, Nannie's instinctive reaction is to shut the door quick. "Nicholas Ray or Satyajit Ray? Samuel Fuller or John Ford?" she asks. Answer: why not both? You might as well say "Soup or sweet" or "Laurel or Hardy" or "Sight or Sound" (as critics did in the thirties) or "painting *or* literature". S & S's inability to think is bound up with its inability to adjust. Because its thoughtless responses are its guide, a *different* response is felt to somehow undermine its authority. It can't conceive that another critic might like Fuller for some reasons and Ford for other reasons. Miss Houston scathingly cites an "Oxford Opinion" remark: "In "Party Girl" there is a shot of a girl lying with her hands

dangling in a bath full of water which is red from the blood of her slashed wrists. Even by Ray standards it is outstandingly beautiful." Oh how morbid. But if you turn to the next article in the same issue of S & S what do you find? Richard Roud is attacking Fereydoun Hoveyda's criticism of "Party Girl" and writes: "Every remarkable shot is mentioned (though not curiously enough, the one I consider the most beautiful...The camera frames the wall at eye-level and then slowly descends to the girl, whom we see bent over the tub, her hair and arms streaming down into the blood-filled bath." One would have thought that Miss Houston would have discussed the issue with her collaborator. "I know that unlike those horrible Teddy Boys from the dreaming spires of the Oxford liberal magazine you are not hungry for kicks at any price, so would you explain to me where the sublimity of this shot lies for you?"

But no. Her colleague's opinions are a closed book to her, and when they are expressed by the "wrong" side they are, it is discreetly implied, ludicrous and disreputable. (Mr. Roud, trying to outsmart Hoveyda, falls into another naivety: he raises his discreet eyebrows because Hoveyda doesn't rhapsodise over his own favourite blood-bath). The trouble with the S & S non-theory is that it is an assortment of prejudices and habits which thinks it is the broadest possible, the biggest and best, range of tastes. Actually, its scope, minimal in the first place, is, not increased, but diminished by the play of the contradictions beneath the mask of tolerant eclecticism. The "form or content" debate exemplifies the process. Penelope Houston, reasonably, insists that the cinema is about human relationships NOT spatial relationships. One gathers that she would also subscribe to Mr. Roud's contention that content is "like" literature and ideas, while form is "like" painting. One more effort and S & S would have hauled itself out of the form-or-content quagmire altogether. Form is "like" painting; but painting has a "content", and this content is carried in the form (shapes, colours, etc) so that in a painting the "spatial relationships" may well "be" the human relationships. Similarly, in literature, literary meanings often depend on the *form* of the phrases (rhythm, alliteration, etc), so that, there too, form = idea. The form of a phrase is itself a phrase inflecting the phrase. Ideational and formal content interinfluence each other and *both are content*. Form is part of the content and "content" is only part of the "content". Abstract painting and music are both "pure form", the ideational content may be absolutely nil. According to the Houston-Roud non-theory, they have no content at all and are presumably insignificant, as being only about spatial and harmonic relationships.

The only formulation which begins to make sense is to say that the "spatial relationships" in Ray, Lang, Antonioni, Mizoguchi et al are the human relationships in metaphor; and that spatial metaphors are no more recondite and baffling than saying, with W. C. Fields, "He has apple cheeks, cauliflower ears and mutton-chop whiskers." But for Mr. Roud the camera-movements in "L'Avventura" are just "patterns in the carpet". In an article article called called "Novel Novel Fable Fable" he turns his back decisively on the only possible solution to the "form or content" debate (a solution which admittedly solves nothing but at least has the merit of opening a new avenue of questions); and discovers that not all stories are novels. One of these days literary critics will stumble on "The Canterbury Tales", "The Decameron", "Le Morte d'Arthur", "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner", and, as for that strange work "Gulliver Travels", it can safely be said that its author, Dean Swift, may yet turn out to be the Samuel Beckett of the New Wave. In fact, of course, a look in 90% of films for what Mr. Roud looks for in novels novels is as silly as looking for impressionism in Henry Moore or for Rembrandt character in "Tom Jones".



THE POWER OF PERSONALITY: Charlton Heston and Eleanor Parker in **The Naked Jungle**

Take away the simplistic distinction between "form" and "content" and the whole 'Sight and Sound' aesthetic collapses. Even Mr. Reid's attempt at compromise is "The French LiLne" is left with its literary ideas on the one hand, and its patterns in the carpet on the other, and never the twain shall meet. A film critic without something of a painter's eye is like an opera critic who's tone deaf. But like so many peopple who can only visualise things in terms of words and ideas Mr. Roud can't steer clear of a solipsistic and jeering verbal tone (= style = content) which amounts to a caricature of the "line" which he purports to be (a) describing and (b) criticising. For example, after noting

that French critics are generally kinder to many American films than English, he proceeds, "It may be difficult for English people to think of Detroit as El Dorado, but it is undeniable that American life in all its forms exercises a very strong hold over present-day young French intellectuals." Leaving aside for a moment the hold it exercises over present-day young English intellectuals (and the function of "trendhounds" as the Kremlinologists of democracy), our main point is Mr. Roud's snide gibes: he caricatures the French *interest* in America as a gullible Utopianism ("El Dorado...") and mysteriously sums up "American life in all its forms" as "Detroit" (why not "New Orleans" or the "West Coast"?). He seems incapable of seeing things in a direct, neutral way: "French intellectuals are interested in America because in American films they recognise predicaments akin to their own and respond with sympathy and insight to the attempted solutions." Hence, French Marxists ("Positif") are as interested in American films as the critics of "Cahiers". Mr. Roud's way of putting things is as ludicrous as insinuating that Lindsay Anderson thinks capitalism is Heaven on earth because he enjoys films about U.S. Cavalry. His own spotty grasp of social realities is revealed by his attempt to attribute the French interest in America to a 20th-century reaction against Cartesianism, which he equates with restraint, rationalism and moderation. Not a word about the French Revolution, the Paris Commune and other little "Cartesian" tiffs. For Mr. Roud history *is* philosophy. And this one-for-one relationship between culture (i.e. taste) and politics turns up again when Mr. Roud concludes that Michel Mourlet is crypto-Fascist (and slightly nutty) on the grounds that Mourlet (a) thinks Charlton Heston has a splendidly male screen personality and (b) admires Lang, Losey (who is a left-winger), Preminger, Walsh, Cottafavi and Don Weis. Mourlet writes: "Charlton Heston by his existence alone gives a more accurate definition of the cinema than films like "Hiroshima Mon Amour" or "Citizen Kane" and Mr. Roud thinks this is very peculiar. But Mourlet is right and Mr. Roud is the eccentric. Since about 1910 the aesthetic of the commercial cinema has been based on the star, on *personality* and, far from being an invention of the Mammon Studios this developed first in Italy and independently in India and Japan. By what process of thought Mr. Roud equates male strength with Fascism I hate to think — I should have thought such an equation was just what "Triumph of the Will" wanted its audience to make, and if something about Charlton Heston is quasi-Fascist, the Western is quasi-Fascist. But Mr. Roud can't say about Mourlet's opinion, simply, "I don't agree. I think it's mistaken", he has to accuse Mourlet of having a swastika embossed in his soul. Cripes. My all-time favourite film star is Lillian Gish in Griffith's early films, presumably this makes me an honorary member of the Ku Klux Klan.

SENSE AND SENSUALITY

All this politicization of taste got so ludicrous that, of course, we have been witnessing over the last two years, the fighting retreat of S & S from the bloody crossroads of semi-commitment, to land plump in the slender arms of "Lola". After giving "Cahiers" a few gratuitous kicks (for all the wrong reasons) S & S sets about imitating it. First, the heavyweight intellectual quotes (Aristotle, Thomas Mann, Balzac). Then, the blobs-and-stars on the back of the MFB. The Catholic streak of "Cahiers" is a bit much, and its addiction to woolly Hegelian dialectics are, as they say in the trade, inimitable, fortunately — I thought we were in for it when we were treated to a comparison between Bergman and oxymoron. But anyway, S & S, after preening itself on its lack of cut-and-dried theories, duly came up with a cut-and-dried theorist, Eric Rhode, who saw films as paradigms of Augustinianism, humanism, existentialism and Rhodeism. At least he brought his basic principles out into the open and in his coldly spherical way ("Art is a cold sphere" as Fats Waller said to Dizzy Gillespie) he said some interesting things. But his tone of superiority, his way of alighting upon films from some private moral stratosphere, and a hypochondriac obsession with psychological "normality" accorded ill with the sympathy needed to respond to works of art, and which with the simple-minded muddle-headedness of his philosophical notions, augured more than a touch of Dyerism. At times he wrote like film criticism's answer to Colin Wilson. His notion of "Centrality" seems to equate humanism with some sort of classicism; he seem to think it entails or favours the well-constructed plot; he believes that the plot which contrasts "the stable world" with "some disruptive force" and then shows the world returning to "its natural harmony" was and in some ways still is particularly useful or true; and seems vagely to connect that sort of plot with "humanism" whereas the other sort of plot is linked to existentialism (which, for good measure, is demonstrably psychotic).

Yet the notion of the world not having an inner core or "essence" isn't peculiar to existentialism at all, it's also built into the assumptions of English pragmatism and scepticism — you wouldn't call Hume or Russell or Ayer "existentialists" at least not without remarking that you are playing musical chairs with conventional terminology. It's equally quaint to imply a comparison between something called Naturalism (which doesn't mean as you'd think, realism, but determinism) and "riotous fantasy" of the mind (All those Surrealistic dancing-girls). But what do all these huge notions mean when you get down to cases? I call myself a humanist critic and indeed a scientific humanist critic and I tend to translate existentialism back into pragmatism (i.e. paradox into compromise), an English tendency, but I don't and never did believe that the plot which contrasts "the stable world" with "some disruptive force" and shows the world returning to "its natural harmony" was more useful or true than any other, in fact I'd say it's a conventional wish-fulfillment. Now I come to think of it, I have always presumed that "the stable order", far from being "harmonious" was naturally an unstable equilibrium of any number of diverse forces, hit on by chance, and of no metaphysical permanence, i.e. I believe that it is in the nature of Nature not to be bothered about what man wants, and that often the happy end to one's life's story comes in the middle, or at the beginning, or not at all. So I suppose I am a stoic scientific humanist critic, except that I'm a hedonist in the vulgar

TWO PERSONALITIES: Kirk Douglas, Kim Novak, Strangers When We Meet

and materialistic (i.e. Bertrand Russell) sense, and as at the drop of a hat I'll set about having a bash at psycho-analysing a film and feeling I'm doing something vaguely interesting, and as I regularly vote Labour and my immediate target would be to see Britain run on Swedish lines politically, you'd have to say I'm a Socialist Freudian Epicurean stoic scientific humanist critic. So much for philosophical pigeonholes: you need at least 57 holes to hold one pigeon, and I haven't even begun to tell you what a loveable character I have.

Of course "A Bout de Souffle" is full of "discontinuities" if you're looking for "continuities" resembling the assumptions of the eighteenth-century neo-platonist parish-pump. Yet the action and plot of Godard's film makes perfect sense; so far as theme, relationships, motivations and narrative determinism are concerned the film is absolutely conventional, as straightforward as "Quai des Brumes".

Philosophically, Mr. Rhode's standpoint is that of arriere-garde neo-platonism onto which psycho-analytical terminology has been grafted. The attempt is frequent these days, and the graft won't last. While it lasts, the effect is of super-Augustinianism: the inquisitor can psycho-analyse his victim and condemn him for his "repressions". A cerebrality like Manicheanism appears again in Mr. Rhode's solo effort on eroticism, which "proved" by a couple of twists of phrase that *only* death gives sensuality its meaning. This profound sentence makes just as much sense back to front ("only sensuality gives death its meaning") but you might just as well say "only death gives language its meaning" or "only death gives pickled onions their meaning". What he seems to be trying to say is, "Don't believe all this superficial rubbish about breasts and bodies, that's all very unhealthy, we're all thoughtful skeletons really." It's an eerie article on the erotic that mentions neither passionate love nor reproduction, which in the human species is sexual — the death instinct's little joke, presumably. He mentions four films as being sensual (and says he's only seen one or two more): "Ossessione" (yes, I had a crick in my neck too, when I came out), "Casque d'Or", "Que Viva Mexico", "Le Dejeuner Sur l'Herbe", and writes, "Only in Eisenstein's case is it fairly certain that he was not primarily motivated by nostalgia". But if Marie Seton's biography is anything to go by then Eisenstein was the most likely to have been motivated by nostalgia — I don't suppose it's necessary to dwell on the homosexual elements in Eisenstein's and Visconti's films?). Mr. Rhode's non-reaction before the scene of Nadia Gray on the fur in "La Dolce Vita" is peculiar — I saw the film twice and both times the audience "felt" the fur — it's Mr. Rhode who doesn't, because in the cinema, as feelies haven't been invented yet, sensuousness is in the mind of the beholder, just as in literature it's in the mind of the reader. But how can you react sensuously to a film when all the time you're worried about whether it's healthy or what philosophical football team the director plays for or whether the jump-cuts are psychotic or not?

Mr. Rhode's interest in personal hygiene even leads him to say, about Visconti, "There is something wrong somewhere when a nobleman makes a film entirely about Sicilian fishermen and the fault doesn't lie only with social conditions and the desire to expose social wrongs. I feel that Visconti (though perhaps to a lesser degree than his contemporaries) is trying in his work to escape from the complex issues from the uses of intelligence." There's no possible defence, of course, against a suggestion so vague that it might as well apply to Lindsay Anderson, Tony Richardson, Karel Reisz, or anybody who comes from from one class or country but habitually makes films about people from another. If Eric Rhode doesn't diagnose directors as sick because they don't put their own problems on the screen, Peter John Dyer will diagnose them as sick because they do.

In "The Listener" Mr. Rhode's view of human nature has gradually become less hypochondriac and mellower: his "Sight and Sound" period illustrates puritanism's last stand: it becomes agnostic and philo-

sophical and talks about "maturity" when it means "salvation". Mr. Rhode's articles were interesting and his departure leaves S and S without a thinker, sinking slowly back to safely non-philosophical, non-committed earth, in short, to Bloomsburylite waffling about aesthetics-qua-aesthetics of which there is a delicious specimen in an article with a sensitively twee bit of anti-syntax en tete, "How Art Is True?" (How true is art, how is art true, is? true; how, art! — aw, shucks) (1).

And then who, as they say in the grunt-and-groan racket, will unmask Arkadin the Mystery Man of Semi-committed criticism? "Movie" thinks it's John Russell Taylor, but we don't mind who it is. Anyway impregnable behind his anonymity, he remarks, "surely it is an unhealthy sign when those who are ostensibly criticizing a film devote so much of their space instead to criticizing other critics." Touche, Monsieur Pussycat, and et tu, brute, come to that, you've just had a delicate go at John Coleman, Isabel Quigley, Dilys Powell and several others. We haven't a clue as to why you do it, but we do it because:—

(1) too many of the critics criticised here make the bland, and, alas, so often *unconscious* assumption that the relationship of critic to film-maker is that of examiner to examinee. Fellini is such a bungling idiot that he can't even stage a strip-tease excitingly, Brooks, Aldrich, Losey, Fuller, Minnelli, never try to do anything that a critic can't sum up off the cuff, the critic may have moral ideas *about* a film but there are rarely moral ideas *in* a film, Visconti and Bergman are just walking about waving their sores in the air, etc. This assumption of superiority leads inevitably to a critical negligence whereby these critics restrict their responses to the run of films to a level of sophistication *below* that of the *average* film director, to the level of the *least* intelligent spectator. Superior in *depreciation*, they are far and away *inferior* in appreciation to Mr. and Mrs. Bloggs.

(2) We must head off the inevitable smear that this is an attack on film criticism. The Dean St. clique still thinks it is film criticism generally, despite accumulating evidence to the contrary. So accumulating that even S & S has finally blossomed out in highbrow quotations (just like "Cahiers"), has contrived to discover Hawks and Losey (just like "Cahiers"), Frank Tashlin (in time for "Bachelor Flat", that is, ten years after the first really glorious Tashlin film, "Susan Slept Here"), has asked "Why don't we take horror films seriously" (the answer is, we always have), and then, aghast at its own daring covered up quickly with "but not seriously seriously" (as you were) has given a Fuller film two stars. But if anyone *else* does it, they're hungry for kicks . . .

(3) It's very odd how the whole commitment debate went through without reference to "Positif". One would have thought that on strategical grounds alone "committed" critics (or their half-hearted champions) would have been glad to direct attention to the work of their French comrades-in-arms. But of course, sneering at "Cahiers" (even while you emulate its "confusionism") is much easier than seeking to understand one's allies. Above all, one is never in danger of not feeling superior, is one? "Positif" calls itself "la revue du cinema la plus aggressive": being openly rude it manages to be less offensive than S & S. Sometimes, we feel, it is to quick on the trigger. Its sometimes very sharp divisions between "left" and "right" attitudes cannot really be applied in Britain, although "Positif" may well still dislike our feeling that there are right-wing critics whose opinions interest us more, and to whom in many ways we feel nearer, than those on the left. We don't think of film criticism as a form of political activity, but are committed in the sense that we have opinions, and see no reason for not bringing them to bear on films. We cite "Positif" because it is (a) committed and (b) its cultural equipment enables it to grapple with contemporary films of all kinds. Opening past issues at random we find incisive and enthusiastic reviews of: "The Girl Can't Help It", "Odds Against Tomorrow", "La Dolce Vita", "Time Without Pity", "Il Cochechito", "Rocco and his Brothers", "Peeping Tom", "Look Back In Anger", "Le Bel Age", "Strangers When We Meet", "The Bells Are Ringing", "The Virgin Spring". If S & S do after all still want to be committed they might with advantage take lessons from "Positif" (and from "La Methode", "Premier Plan", "Contre-Champ") and forgo their opportunistic derivations from "Cahiers".

(4) It's high time our highbrows dropped their supercilious (S & S) or paranoiad (Hoggart) attitude to the mass media and mitigated their lofty disinterest in what the general public wants and why.

(5) We believe there is a necessity for critical disagreements, counter-interpretations, cross-purposes, debates. We are not quibbling with S & S because they didn't enthuse over the films we liked. Nor have we merely culled a Golden Treasury of Howlers—which no critic can altogether avoid. We are saying that just as "Definition" killed committed criticism, so "Sight and Sound" with its unique prestige has over the last ten years done more to keep English film criticism naive than no criticism at all would have done.

If it now wants to take notice of any of these criticisms, it's very welcome. No-one will be more pleased than we will.

The cover of the Spring '63 is obviously neo-"Movie", suggesting another fashionable shift of emphasis: if you can't sneer 'em out of court, imitate 'em. As always, the "outside" contributions are the most interesting: Geoffrey Nowell-Smith not only grasps some of the basic issues in the "S & S" — "Movie" needle-match (nth round) but actually contrives to treat "Movie" with courtesy. Arkadin, the Doctor Death of film criticism, gets submission grips on a couple of obvious deadbeats, but his try at reconciling his rationalist principles with out-Cahiering "Cahiers" in uprooting adorable turnips is feeble because he still hasn't grasped the rules of the game and still can't decide whether or not to take himself seriously. A survey of "Blockbusters" tries to be toughly practical about the trade, but can't make it because neither of the authors has a clue as what or why or how the public "sees" films. For example: of "Spartacus": "the audience responded to the well-staged gladiatorial contests and left the moralising to look after itself." Not at my local Odeon they didn't; they responded to all the moral climaxes and cheered two of them. The British public isnt as stupid as "Nice Time"—besotted "intellectuals" seem to imagine.

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(1) The post-Dyer M.F.B. veers to the more genial but pays for it by inconsistency. Worse, the anonymity of many reviews makes it impossible to make allowances for critics' idiosyncracies.

EPICS

Photos: top left — **Hercules Conquers Atlantis.** Bottom right — **Hercules at the Centre of the Earth.** Other two — **Spartacus.**

(A taped conversation between John Cutts, Raymond Durgnat, Ian Johnson, Douglas McVay and Richard Whitehall).

RW: The basis of the epic is a largeness of conception. The first epic is *The Birth of a Nation* — rather than those Ancient Rome spectacles that the Italians produced. The most recent is *How the West Was Won* rather than *Taras Bulba*.

JC: We must distinguish between the epic and the spectacular.

DM: An epic is a film with nobility — moral and physical.

RW: De Mille has always tried the epic and failed dismally in practically everything. In *Union Pacific* and in *The Plainsman* he brought it off. In *Unconquered* he didn't. *The Ten Commandments* and *The Crusades* just haven't got it.

DM: The old literary epics celebrate the quality of heroism: works like *The Battle of Malden* and *Beowulf* or the *Song of Roland* or the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* — these were heroes — their physical courage had a spiritual quality.

IJ: An epic implies big events, events which are big even against a wide, historical scale.

DM: And yet the hero should bestride the screen like a colossus — as those in *The Alamo* do.

RD: Perhaps this combination is the key. The personal story in an epic has to lead on to a sense of historical decision, or of mythological grandeur. But the two are interwoven with a certain equality. The hero isn't "related to" his social background, he is himself a social force, on a par with it. El Cid saves the West. The hero is man scaled up to history.

RW: Can a documentary be an epic? Is *Grass* an epic?

DM: No, you must have an epic hero, or group of heroes engaged in one enterprise or adventure, as in Homer and Vergil.

RW: The true epic always has something romantic about it — even if it's apparently realistic.

RD: This establishes our connection, or rather collision, between epics and the puritan theme. The epic has none of the puritan aesthetic virtues. It isn't psychological, it's usually romantic rather than realistic, its social significance is usually remote or escapist, its moral is almost always totally useless in our real life situations, its values are simple, it affirms rather than questions, and its solutions are extroverted ones. The very scale of the epic hero offers the spectator an immodest identification.

DM: As in *El Cid* — there's this idea of his riding out at the end — he's dead, but he's not dead. Zapata is dead, but his spirit is ever with us. Arthur is going to come and re-claim his sword, one day. Will Shane come back one day, as the boy hopes he will? Even on the record of *The Alamo*, there are "the ghostly voices in the sky, remembering".

EPICS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REALISM

JC: Are *The Bridge on the River Kwai* and *Lawrence of Arabia* epics? Isn't there too much neurosis and equivocation? If the epic deals in simple issues and loyalties, these films both boil down to a lot of nuts doing nutty things.

RD: The trouble with *Lawrence of Arabia* is that it sounds too much like *Laurence of Olivier*.

DM: *Lawrence* is a study in a psychological condition. He's epic on the surface but his character underneath is so mixed up. He can't qualify. Unlike Alexander Nevski.

JC: *Alexander Nevski* isn't about Alexander Nevski, it's just about a lot of knights charging up and down on the ice. What can you honestly say about Nevski? He's there, but Trafalgar Square is there. Nelson on his column is there, but he's not alive — any more.

DM: He's a leader of men, he's one corporate unit with his men, he wins battles, he saves his country. It's superbly made, it's *the* epic . . .

JC: *Lawrence of Arabia* shoots to the other extreme. The posters show this mysterious, romantic figure in the sheet and the Mr. Macmillan hat — and the film says what we all know, what a poor mixed-up fellow he was. It knocks its own hero, in fact.

RD: Yet surely his homosexual traits have no bearing on his epic scale.

JC: Ten years ago Errol Flynn would have played that part as a sort of Robin Hood. Nowadays you'd have the suggestion that he was getting up to Little John or Alan-a-dale. The classic case is *Spartacus* Kirk Douglas, obviously, has both of them, Tony and Jean. The parallel is there. Laurence Olivier wants both of them He doesn't get them.

RW: The trouble with *Lawrence of Arabia* is that it tries to explain its characters, which is irrelevant to an epic. And it can't explain him . . .

DM: And this brings it into the realms of a psychological casebook.

RD: Need we really be so defensive about psychological complications in epics? Don't you feel that the tendency nowadays is quite naturally to approach things with psychological interests in mind: one spontaneously asks oneself: "why did he do this? what streak of character drove him to these exceptional acts?".

JC: The danger to the epic comes when you feel that the event itself isn't enough; that you have to explain the reasons all the time.

RD: Yes; if you introduce the reason with the intention of debunking the events, you no longer have an epic. But the explanation and the action itself can co-exist — so long as, instead of using psychology to explain away, you turn things round, and say: "Even if the man was a field day for Freudians in himself, nonetheless, he carried history on his shoulders for a while; isn't this a noble, self-justifying thing?".

JC: Yes, it's a question of whether you dehumanise or rehumanise your character. Bolt does exactly the same thing, he explains Sir Thomas More just as Brecht explains Galileo, but their actions in themselves speak for themselves, as Gunga Dinism.

DM: I'd say Ivan the Terrible in the first part of Eisenstein's film is an epic hero. But, in the second part where there's much more doubt in his own mind he becomes a tragic-dramatic figure, and ceases to be an epic figure. He's too much involved in Hamlet-type intrigues. Whereas in the first part he's a Nevski-like figure, leading the people in exactly the same way as Nevski. Later he becomes a different character. Both parts are excellent, but in different ways. And that's what makes me feel that the tragic character and the epic character are incompatible. You can't blend them, at least, not with equal weight.

RD: It seems to me that you ought to blend them, even if not with equal weight. Because if you don't you're left with your "Boy's Own Paper" heroes on the one hand and —

DM: It doesn't have to be a "Boys' Own Paper" hero. It depends how you do it. There's a world of difference between Tarzan and Nevski.

RD: Often, though, your hero, in real life, has to wade through a great deal of moral doubt. Either he says to himself: "I'm running this country and this war and I'm going to carry out my policies and not think about whether what I'm doing is wrong" — which is how a great many politicians get round the moral anguish of power — or the hero does worry about it, in which case there is a dramatic plot or subplot about his moral worries. But surely nowadays the finer, the real epic hero will have doubts . . .

JC: And there are few moral heroes who don't involve themselves in moral controversies — from Cromwell to Parnell — even Robin Hood . . .

EPICS AND MORAL WEIGHT

DM: Robin Hood isn't an epic hero — at least I've never seen a Robin Hood film that made me care —

IJ: Because you miss the social background. But the Peasants' Revolt would be a marvellous subject.

DM: I don't think an epic hero has to have a social background. I know Ray said so but I don't agree. Society may be involved, but it's always subordinate.

RD: The social background is the be-all and end-all of Robin Hood. He robs the rich to help the poor. Who cares if he was as nutty as Lawrence of Arabia?

DM: Yes, but what really matters about him is that he's a good man. He does good, brave, deeds for the people, but it's the good deeds which are the essential epic quality.

JC: Hardly. Robin Hood was a nobleman who'd been turned out of his home.

RD: Is a saint *ipso facto* an epic hero? Can a saint be an epic hero?

IJ: Monsieur Vincent for example.

RD: If you stretch a thousand points . . . but a high proportion of saints are self-centred, their thoughts are focused on their own salvation, they squat on top of their columns like Nelson's stone lump.

IJ: It's interesting that American epics like *Ben Hur*, or *Barabbas* play down the Christ figure and it's always someone else who is the epic hero.

JC: At least Barabbas can throw stones.

DM: *King of Kings*?

RD: Maybe that's an epic, because there is this sense of a huge moral shift in everybody's attitude to everything, especially to violence. The destiny of the world hinges on these simple words on this green hillside. *Ben Hur* is an epic because Ben Hur's private story is matched with that of Christ. It's huge, but simple, so that it still counts as an epic rather than as a drama.

DM: A pacifist film by its nature cannot be an epic.

JC: A pacifist film by its nature cannot be an epic? Here's a point — *Ben Hur* is a pacifist film. Or rather it could be in its pure form. I think it was in the Ramon Novarro version. In the Wyler, I think, there are many other issues involved — the chariot race, the blood — Ben Hur himself doesn't play dirty, but Wyler does, in satisfying us with all this "accidental" violence.

RD: *Joan of Arc* — that might be an epic story, not because she's a saint, but because she's a warrior.

JC: Like Boadicea.

IJ: This came out in the Ingrid Bergman version — it was about the only point that did come out —

DM: Would you say that Schweitzer was an epic hero?

JC: Saints are interesting, though. There's this film Dmytryk make about a year ago that they're holding down. It sends up this gentle-man who walks on air, like the absent-minded professor.

RW: Yes, the first time he preaches his sermon he rises about ten feet above the congregation.

JC: The Americans are great ones for righteousness. They can not make a simple film about a do-gooder who fights back, say, King Arthur, without having at least half the film taken up by a discussion, a rationalization on what a demarcracy is, and why all these good gentlemen are sitting round a round table. Straying from the subject slightly, I saw a little TV thing in the *Naked City* series. It was called *A Horse Has a Big Head. He Should Worry*. The subject was a blind boy wandering from end of New York to the other, cars and all. But half of it wasn't concerned with how this boy got on, but about this priggish little negro teacher and democracy-preacher — Diahann Carroll of all people — standing by and rationalising and asking herself if her motives are pure. And an American epic will talk itself to death. The Italian epics are much faster, just streams of action that justify themselves as they go along.

DM: A case in point — *Sodom and Gomorrah*.

JC: *Moby Dick* is an epic, in Melville's original conception. But can the screen carry such a moral depth as the book? By showing the action physically, the moral questions are not so clear-cut — or too clear-cut.

RD: One has to consider the hybrid film — the film that's an epic in some ways but not in others. *War and Peace* is an anti-epic epic: the epic structure is set up so as to disqualify it; military glory isn't half as meaningful as picking daisies.

MODERN EPICS

JC: Aren't there any modern epics? climbing Mount Everest?

RW: *Scott of the Antartic* surely is an epic story but it's not given the right treatment.

IJ: Historically, an epic implies a big nationalism with a big person.

DM: Oh no, let's not insist on a big nationalism. Think of all the films that have been ruined by a strident nationalism. Personal heroism is what matters. When a film becomes too nationalistic, you can write it off as just propaganda — *The Fall of Berlin*, even, to a lesser extent, *October* and *Strike*. Whereas in *Potemkin*, which does succeed, it's the human element which comes first. These men revolt because of their rotten conditions, and to better themselves as men. A Communist ideal as such is subconscious or implicit or absent. But in *Strike* and *October* the human scale is lost in all the intellectual symbolism about revisionism and so on.

JC: Society gets the heroes it deserves.

RD: Westerns easily have an epic quality because in that epoch society was loose, there was nothing between man and the skies, nothing between two men but a handshake or a gun, so

there a tremendous weight of moral decision overlay everything. For Americans this state of affairs existed within living memory, whereas we Europeans have to go back to the Dark Ages or classical antiquity or wartime to find this atmosphere. Epic heroes today are much more self-effacing because everyone thinks of himself as a foot-slogger. But in the good old mythological days the issues which concerned the state were almost the same as those which concerned you as individuals.

RW: Yes, and the same is true of *How the West Was Won*, and that's why I'm positive that it's an epic — a great epic.

DM: It's an epic without a hero.

RD: Except that really there were thousands of such families who between them won the west, whereas it's Hercules and his two pals who conquer Atlantis less.

DM: Just as Horatio and his two pals hold the bridge.

RD: There's a difference of scale between the two settings.

RW: There may be thousands of such families winning the west but that in no way diminishes the heroism of this particular family.

RD: That's true.

RW: *Gone With the Wind* is not an epic, because all Scarlett does is look after her little self. But *Rocco and his Brothers* is an epic — the first epic of realism, just as much as *The Birth of a Nation*. In Griffith's film you have the collapse of the South, in Visconti's you have the collapse of the South. The mother is a magnificent epic heroine.

DM: There are several epic heroines in war films. Violet Szabo, Odette Churchill, symbolising the possibly millions of women who one way or another were tortured during the war. The heroine of *Carve Her Name With Pride* is an epic figure — only the actual body of the film hasn't an epic quality.

RW: Boadicea would be an epic heroine but not Violet Szabo.

JC: On that scale, Sam Spade is an epic hero. He sends Mary Astor up at the end irregardless of sleeping with her because he's so goddam moral. He's a knight-errant of morality and justice.

RW: But he muddles them, doesn't he? He has the girl and then sends her up, so he has his cake and eats it.

JC: He doesn't have her at the moment of sending her up. He's not James Bond. It comes as a genuine shock to Spade that she's a murderess.

RW: Sam Spade's last line is, "Don't think I'm as crooked as I'm made out to be," which is his philosophy. It's surely an unheroic sort of heroism — compared with El Cid, say, who also has woman trouble.

JC: El Cid lived in heroic times — but Sam Spade lives in an asphalt jungle — can you imagine anyone being heroic today: Mr. Magoo? as Don Quixote? Anthony Eden? Gandhi?

RW: Not after *Nine Hours to Rama*.

JC: Gandhi's not the hero of *Nine Hours to Rama*: the man who shoots him is. That's probably significant.

IJ: Gandhi is another Christ?

RD: Modern war is more a matter of passive endurance in organised masses than individual qualities of character. No one man decides anything, unless he's a politician or a general or a business-man and rather remote from the fray.

JC: *The Diary of Anne Frank* is a case in point. Stevens is a name that always comes up in discussing epics. *Giant* is an epic, in fact, it's a businessman's epic; *Shane* is an epic. But then Stevens tried to bring the same emphasis to poor little Anne Frank. He tried to bring a Gunga Din hugeness into her little room. The story is basically a small story whose epic implications should be organically contained within it, but Stevens approached it from the outside, he sought his epic quality in sets, casting, long takes.

DM: It apes the epic manner of *Shane* but at times it's more like *I Remember Mama*.

RW: *Shane* is like *High Noon*, it's a Western for people who despise Westerns.

JC: And now he's trying for the greatest epic of all time — *The Greatest Story Ever Told*.

DM: I've got a terrible feeling that that's going to be The Worst Film Ever Made.

RD: Except *Wilson*.

EPICS AND CANNON-FODDER

JC: *The Alamo* is an epic — and I pick my words carefully — of endurance. You sit there wondering how long it's going to go on. Maybe Bowie, Davy Crockett and Travers are heroic figures, but not as conceived by Laurence Harvey, Richard Widmark and John Wayne. The film makes the point that the leader of *The Alamo* never even told the men that the odds were against them, that they were going to die. They deliberately withheld the information. This makes it murder. They commit them to death. They don't give them the choice, they say, reinforcements are coming — in point of fact, reinforcements never arrived. The leaders trick their men into dying so how can this be an epic?

DM: But the job of the ordinary soldier is to accept orders. Do you think if you were in Montgomery's army Montgomery would have come down and taken you aside and given you a friendly word: "Look here, old chap, would you mind dying . . ."

JC: No, that's why the epic spirit is gone from war. We're conscripts. It's like going to the gallows. *Lion of Sparta* — now that has the theme of men dying gloriously for a cause which they believed in — as opposed to *The Alamo* where they hadn't a clue as to what was being done to them.

DM: In Anthony Mann's *Men At War* you get a line, "Show me a foot soldier and I will show you the story of all wars." The foot-soldier is not an epic hero, usually. The actual heroes in *The Alamo* are the leaders. I'm not making a Fascist case, or anything like that.

JC: I think you are.

DM: No I'm not.

JC: I really think you are, inasmuch as —

DM: I'm certainly not...Because these men are doing it for a noble ideal, whereas Fascists —

RW: Don't epics just focus on the leaders, quite arbitrarily, just as other types of film pick other types of character? We agreed that *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* was an epic, yet these three characters sail away, they don't stop to tell the sailors that the journey they're going on is dangerous and may eventually lead to death.

RD: Perhaps they tell them, between the fade-outs and -ins. I think they tell them, and pay them well, and the sailors are buccaneer-type riff-raff who'd dare the devil for gold. When war was considered glorious, then you could get people who'd volunteer for it for its own sake — tunes of glory rather than just being a half-starved peasant or a base mechanical.

IJ: But the sailors in *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* mutiny. But isn't there some sort of warning alarm which goes off when a social group feels itself threatened and people rally to the group cause? Which doesn't mean to say, objectively speaking, they are necessarily right.

JC: I don't mind dying for somebody tomorrow so long as he tells me why and so long as I've got freedom of choice. I'm by nature a private, I'm not a lance-corporal or a corporal. Wayne and these leaders, they're born corporals. They'd just relish getting me to die for all their pet causes. But it's my life that's at stake as well and I would want to know who and why and what I was dying for.

RW: Surely if we're going to boil all this down to politics all epic heroes are Fascists.

JC: Horatio and the boys at the bridge knew exactly what they were doing. The Light Brigade knew the odds.

RD: Isn't there a streak of Fascism in all government? If you want to, say, nationalise steel, you'll never do it by respecting everybody's opinions. You can only do it by saying, "We're going to nationalise steel in the interest of the majority." In the sense that your motives are the greatest good of the greatest number, it's not Fascist. But democracies are quite often pretty Fascist, if by Fascist you mean arbitrary, towards minorities e.g. individuals like us. The Tories as much as anybody else.

IJ: All government, by definition, is authoritarian.

JC: *The Alamo* gets round it by sheer romanticism. All these men at the beginning of the film are portrayed as a collection of whisky-swilling buffoons, all in love with John Wayne. They follow him everywhere, they can't stop talking about dear old John Wayne. They trust him, they trust him like mad, and what happens, he gets the whole boiling lot of them shot.

DM: Ah, but he dies with them.

JC: That's no consolation to their widows, is it?

RW: I must say, this suggestion, that all epic heroes are Fascists and all their followers are homosexuals, is something that had never occurred to me.

DM: We've now established the ultimate epic heroes: Leopold and Loeb. It's got everything.

JC: Probably a lot of epic heroes were just as nutty — like Captain Ahab.

RD: This moral anguish is in Shakespeare though, isn't it? Henry V before the battle of Agincourt broods in his tent, he's sending all these fine men to their deaths and perhaps he'll lose the battle anyway, so they'll all have died for nothing at all. He thinks it all out and then he says: Well, that's the only way to run a country.

DM: Yes, this would have been true of Churchill in this last war. Churchill is an epic hero, in wartime — what he is in peacetime is completely irrelevant. But men died for Churchill. When he said, "We'll fight them on the beaches" etc this was an epic speech.

IJ: Maybe an epic hero has to be a myth. In real life Churchill is a clever politician. Robert Ardrey in "African Genesis" says that what men are really interested in is territoriality. He argues against Freud and says that men are interested not so much in sex as in preserving their territory.

DM: Including sexual?

IJ: Yes, but only secondarily. Come to think of it, most epic heroes don't have much sex life. Or it takes a secondary place.

JC: The Alamo, in historical fact, was packed with whores. One person escaped, and she was a whore, to tell the story.

DM: It's still an epic story. One of the most moving moments I've ever known in films was when the boy soldier doffed his hat at the sight of the slaughter. I was crying by then, it's perfectly true.

RW: This convinces me I really ought to see *The Alamo*.

JC: The laughter of Whitehall, Johnson and Durgnat gives the game away.

DM: It may do for you — but when did you last cry at the pictures, John?

JC: I was near to tears during *Tamiko*, if you will have it.

DM: Well, there you are. Nothing wrong with crying. Ian Cameron wept buckets at *Fanny*.

RD: Josh Logan's?

DM: Yes, Josh Logan's.

JC: I'm quite willing to believe that if Ford had made *The Alamo* we'd have a different film which could qualify as an epic — but Wayne, never. I'm just sick of the way film-makers just assume that the Poor Bleedin Public is ready to lay down its life at the drop of a hat.

RD: Which is the epic story of World War III? *Panic In Year Zero*?

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HOMAGE TO HERCULES

THE POPULARITY of Italian epics among intellectuals, in France especially, but increasingly here, too, is intriguing; for in so many ways these films are the absolute negation of everything which intelligent filmgoers have been demanding for years. They're big, bold, simple. Although intellectuals are supposed to be interested mainly in deep meanings, and profound and gloomy thought, these films exalt the superficial — pattern and colour, swordplay, the flesh. Their view of the cosmos is archaic. In an age when most of us are agnostics, the Gods are constantly working miracles, and even if we're Christians, we're still in trouble, because they're all pagan miracles. They relate man to society, but in a way which is a complete reversal of "serious" social significance. They don't show men caught, Zavattini-wise, in a vortex of social pressures; on the contrary, the hero dominates society, and often its destiny is determined by his sword, his adulteries, his promises, his muscles.

These films are a form of escapism, yes — but the escapism is often of a particularly therapeutic kind. We should define our age as the age of routine ideology, alienation and conscription. Man is educated to ignore his body, to split reason and emotion, to renounce spiritual initiative and submit to conveyer belts, rat races, barrack-rooms and bye-laws. We're not Orwellian about this, we don't believe spiritual doom is nigh, and that we should all Prepare To Meet Thy Big Brother; on the contrary, we believe that epics appeal to a powerful and praiseworthy nostalgia, amongst those most prone to our cultural ills, highbrows. Behind every pair of pince-nez a Hercules is striving to be Unchained. Hence the curious affinity between the films' two audiences: French intellectuals, who are super- cerebral, and Italian lowbrows, who are often illiterate. The highly cultured are driven by a violent nostalgia, the peasants still think in "muscular" terms. Anyway, as so often, the highbrow is only a lowbrow manqué . . . or a man who rediscovers, through thought, the innocence the noble savage never lost (1).

Not that they're Rousseauist films. Their political philosophy may be summed up by contrast with the postwar Western. The Western is rather despairing about man's relations to society. What is society? on the one hand, it's cattle-barons and their hired gunmen, on the other hand, it's barbed wire and truckloads of lavatory pans. The homesteaders and the Chavaliers de la Legion de Shane are being driven into a sort of Injun-reservation known as Dogpatch, U.S.A. (2). But the Italian epic has a less anguished individuality. The Hercules films protest against the "atomisation" of our society by appealing to a classical age when the State was so small that it still had something of the "blood-brotherhood" of the tribe. State and friendship were one. *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* and *Hercules in the Centre of the Earth* both begin with Hercules having a quiet drink in a tavern, or an afternoon nap in the sun, while his pal the Prince flirts with a pretty peasant wench. That's democracy.

There's also a robust assertion of loyalty, happiness, friendship and pleasure. In an age which assumes that education and intelligence are panaceas, they're physique films. They're reassertions of happy brawn. Hercules placidly idling up to the very last moment of danger is an antithesis of our wage-slave-to-routine notions of the masculine role. The glorious Italian spirit of *dolce far niente* makes a real contrast with the American epic. *Ben Hur, El Cid* and *Sodom and Gomorrah* are all Victorian, derived from the quasi-celibate Western, very suspicious of idleness, pleasure, and women painting their faces, while the virtuous characters are preoccupied with violence and death. Almost all the Biblical epics are American, almost all the Italian epics are pagan. In the American epic, the country is always associated with purity and asceticism, e.g., "The Sermon on the Mount", in the Italian epic it's associated with simple sensuous pleasure, from having a nap to romping in the hay . . . Even the visual tonality has the beauty of a "sweet pastorale". Cottafavi is the master of this, though his palette aspires to the bronze and scarlets; but there's a great deal of loveliness in *The Giant of Marathon* and even *Warriors Empress*, which, in Italian, is *Sappho, Queen of Lesbos* but which, in the

(1) We shouldn't ignore altogether three, in our estimation, unworthy reasons for admiring epics. One is the critical desire to cut a figure by being different. Another is battle-fatigue: bad films are such a nice rest from good ones. The third is malignant — muscleman films are felt as glorifications of force and of the fuhrerprinzip.

(2) Hercules, like L'il Abner, is an amiably narcissistic philanthropist; Mammy Yokum produces musclemen by feeding them on Yokumberry Tonic, while Antinea concocts her Aryan Ubermensch by exposing them to Uranus's radioactive bloodclot.

teeth of its own titles, is a study in innocence. With the spacious Mediterranean sky, the tingling blue of the sea, the girls' short skirts, clear limbs and swinging ponytails, the white horses proudly tossing manes and hooves along the clear yellow beaches, the glaring red of temple columns, we're back in the morning of the world. Many of the shots have a lovely sense of innocence as a *positive*, of purity as a *physical* quality, of strength and beauty as pure.

2

Technicolor is right for the Greek world. The Greeks did paint their statues and their temples in Cottafavi colours. They were half-savages and less ascetic than we are. Only post-Christian aesthetics have made us think of their statues as white, dull, cold, academic things. Plato was not a typical Greek, but an "outsider". Blake thought he was revolting against the classical stronghold on emotion in art, but he was only revolting against eighteenth-century neo-Platonist neo-classicism. I'm sure Blake would have enjoyed *Hercules Conquers Atlantis*. The quality of innocence is summed up by those scenes where the hero is shipwrecked, nearly drowned, and washed up by the (fundamentally rather kindly) sea, onto some glorious yellow beach. He lies on the sand, wakes, looks around him; with a kind of serene, kindly confidence. There's a Godlike humility...

The staging of the films is often similarly tranquil. The films aren't built around cutting, but on space within the shot. Often, even at pretty violent moments, there is a quiet, contemplative air, as if we were watching a battle or a fight from some high hilltop. The shots have this painterly quality, a Renaissance freshness. In a different way, a Cottafavi battle has the frozen quality of an Uccello. These films are doing for the general public almost exactly what the Renaissance painters did for the noblemen and intellectuals of their day — appealing to the classical tradition, with its sensuality and worship of physical beauty, against the Christian strain.

Even in their mise-en-scene the films are painterly — cutting is soft-pedalled for the sake of space. Who invented the zoom-lens? Tintoretto. The way his corridors and arcades charge up Perspective Hill towards a distant "character" or vignette is often more than a leisurely tracking shot, it's a Pancinor wham. Any Italian director can think in Cinemascope, because in Italy painting is a predominant part of culture. Not so the Anglo-Saxons. After *Land of the Pharoahs* Hawks criticized Cinemascope: "it's distracting, it's hard to focus attention, and it's very difficult to cut... It's very hard for an audience to focus — they have too much to look at... they can't see the whole thing." Those difficulties do quite often weaken the drama of Italian epics — the background swamps the action, emotionally, and becomes the foreground. The contemplative effect is not always deliberate. Still, Cottafavi and Bava manage the wide-screen with little or no loss of dramatic accent. But few American directors are "painters". De Mille had a painterly style, though he had a Victorian lowbrow's taste. Cukor and Minnelli are notable exceptions, but even Ray uses 'Scope on a kind of "fluidised theatrical se." rather than in a painterly way.

The Anglo-Saxon is so refractory to painting because it's traditionally neglected by middle-class culture — unlike the novel. And it's neglected by middle-class culture because the Puritans smashed statues and pictures in churches, but emphasised the Bible and invented, or reinvented, the realistic novel. Still today, cinema has a low respectability rating because it's visual, colourful, and sensual, and Puritans complain that images are taking over from words — but as Renoir remarked, why shouldn't they? Maybe it's high time. There's a surfeit of words, dogmas... and nothing like an Italian epic to clear the mind.

3

My impression is that the Italian epic has yet to reach maturity; and of those I have seen the nearest to it is Mario Bava's *Hercules in the Centre of the Earth*. It's untypical, in its emphasis on horror, and it's also a very uneven film, indeed, it collapses about halfway through. But some of the earlier sequences are both decorative and gripping. Cottafavi is probably a more sophisticated artist than Bava — in fact, Bava's film is full of cribs from Cottafavi's — zoom-shots into the sun and moon, the plague theme, and so on. At each shot in *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* I found myself crying, "Delightful! beautiful! marvellous!" but I felt rather detached from the action. I wasn't frightened when the hero was, I felt there was a certain formula: Hercules is lazy, Hercules acts, Hercules wins, Q.E.D. When a lion pounces on him, it's obviously some moth-eaten old rug... Cottafavi has an Olympian detachment from the story; Bava is less glitteringly brilliant, but he plays the game which the story suggests. He wants his monsters to frighten you, whereas Cottafavi smiles, "If you want to frighten yourself by them, then help yourself, I'll obligingly go through the motions, but I'm not really interested in that, I'm in love with the glint of the sun on the sea..." For me, Cottafavi has nothing to match that scene where Hercules and Theseus struggle across the vine suspended over boiling lava — a fantastic blend

of beauty and lyricism. Or the journey to Hades — with the sea churning like sickly rice-pudding, the sky a solid block of brick-red, a black cloud spreading out like squid's ink. Bava's colour-sense is quite weird, as far removed as possible from Cottafavi's heraldic shine. He has penchant for brooding, sullen mauves and blues, for specks of soft, fungoid, sherbert-like light. Even the columns in the palace are flesh-coloured and convex, swelling like Reg Park's biceps. His eye for beefcake is quite fine — while Reg Park is hanging on the vine over the bubbling lava, his biceps bulge like batwings. Muscles cluster like coconuts all over him. And he has a kind face.

4.

Cottafavi has a Latin intelligence, very sharp and clear and amiably ruthless. Bava has a streak of Germanic expressionism and murkiness. There is one scene during an eclipse of the sun where Hercules runs over a jagged, smoky skyline, obviously into a spotlight. As it silhouettes him he seems to be radiating thick beams of black light. Then he disappears over the brow of the hill, and there are just these quivering shafts of blackness pointing up into the sky, marking his progress. I can imagine a Bava "Gotterdammerung", with Charlton Heston as Thor . . . .

The ideas in Bava's film are haunting too. As Hercules and Theseus are wandering through Hades, they slash at some dead vines, which emit an unearthly shriek and the stems drip blood. The vines contain the souls of the damned . . .

As to what's wrong with the film, there's so much and it's so glaring that I haven't the heart or the space to list it all — nor, alas, will it escape any spectator's attention. Even Christopher Lee is bad, and Hercules does little but throw cardboard rocks. All the same, Bava's expressionist fervour is I feel a move towards a sincerely, fully poetic epic.

Raymond Durgnat

ERCOLE vs HERCULES

In much the same way that Cottafavi's Italian *Vengeance of Hercules* had its hero and plot metamorphosed into *Goliath and the Dragon* by the time the English language prints were dubbed, Mario Bava's *Hercules in the Centre of the Earth* has been truncated and distorted (i.e. about three scenes totally missing, and half the film's meaning distorted), and released some two years after its completion. While watching the version released here (and presumably the American version too), you may have wondered why Pluto, God of the Underworld, goes to so much trouble to lay waste Hercules' country and rain curses on the land, when all Hercules' pal Theseus has done is to carry off Pluto's lovely daughter from her Hades home. The extent of Pluto's wrath is more easily understood though, when we look at the synopsis of the Italian version. Here we read that "a sorceress informs Hercules that the God Pluto is displeased because Theseus has carried off his *wife*". By rather prudishly inserting "daughter" for "wife" in the dubbing, the meaning of nearly half the developments in the film have been distorted and the balance of emphasis misplaced.

Was there any need either to axe out the scene where Hercules and Theseus "are obliged to overcome the entire crew of a ship" in order to get to Hades? — solid action footage, now entirely missing and all references dubbed out. And why abandon the scenes where "Hercules builds a temple to the God Pluto, who in anger destroys it"? And we'd also like to see the now missing footage where imported vampire Christopher Lee "spreads terror in the city by killing a number of beautiful maidens." In the English print he only kills one beautiful maiden, and the climax of *that* has been cut (blood-drained face presumably) by our censor.

There is also the suggestion that another scene has gone. Hercules is informed that Theseus has died in boiling lava beds. Hercules looks sad. Cut to the two buddies walking along together as if nothing has happened, and not a word of explanation.

Because the genre is generally despised, the censors/distributors are allowed to get away with this wholesale butchery. (Chopping scenes to make a film run a suitable time is like hacking chunks off a Picasso canvas to make it fit the Tate wall). In something as crude as, say, *Blood of the Warriors* it's bad enough, but the barbarism is loathsome in a film like Bava's which is impeccably and incredibly well realised (Bava directed, photographed and wrote it). Imagine the outcry if the film had been signed by Cocteau, whom Bava's hand sometimes resembles in its conjuring of imagery. — CHRIS WICKING.

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HOLLYWOOD'S NED KELLY

IF A FEROCIOUS INDIVIDUALISM is both America's shame and America's glory, Kirk Douglas is so ultra-American as to be almost un-American. Every film he has produced is a defiant shriek in favour of total liberty; intermittently rising to the pitch of a "hurlement en faveur de Sade". To Chris Marker's contemptuous portrait of the last Siberian individualists, the forlorn gold-diggers, Kirk ripostes with: *Lonely Are the Brave* — an unabashed glorification of last-ditch, antisocial, suicidal individualism. Against the smug middle-class conformity rampant in the States, Kirk uncompromisingly swings round to an extreme left-wing position: *Spartacus* is adapted by Dalton Trumbo from a novel by Howard Fast (1).

Without Kirk Douglas half of Hollywood's most courageous, and ferocious, films would never have been made: *Paths of Glory, Town Without Pity* .... The defence of liberty acquires a Sadistic (in the best sense) tinge in *The Vikings*. Tony Curtis grins as his pet falcon rips Kirk Douglas's eye out of its socket, and he's entitled to, because Kirk has enslaved him. Kirk attempts a crustaceous (see MOTION 4) revenge. But, a few reels later, we are sympathising with this bloodthirsty slave-driver against Sir Cedric Hardwicke, the treacherous English Christian (the film's spoof Coronation scene is a tonic). The audience cheers the villainous Kirk as he crashes feet-first through the stained-glass window of the sanctuary, determined to rape the film's heroine, Janet Leigh. For honest brutality is preferable to slimy Christianity ... Fascism?—there's nothing here that's not in Neitschze; and *Paths of Glory* and *Town Without Pity* reveal the broad streak of anarchistic humanitarianism which is the mainspring of the producer's inspiration.

Our "critics without pity!" hardly enthused over *Spartacus;* the public, happily, did. Howard Fast's novel is a very clever superimposition of modern on classical politics; indeed, it springs from a seriously Marxist re-analysis of classical history (2).

Epics, especially American ones, usually content themselves with a ludicrous goodies-baddies morality: the only historical issues producers can think of are "freedom vs. slavery", "civilisation vs. barbarism" and "Christians vs. the rest". *Spartacus* is on the *Advise and Consent* level. The aristocrats (Olivier) oppose the democratic, or rather demagogic, "plebs" party (Laughton). Neither care about the slaves, whose fate is finally settled by bribes, i.e. wealth, i.e. economic power. Of the two parties, the demogogic is the more sympathetic to the slaves — because more money-grubbing, i.e. corrupt, i.e. reasonable. But the moral overtone remains: if the slaves, or have-nots, or underprivileged minorities, (e.g. the negroes), or the under-developed nations, of the world, don't take up arms and cause trouble, not even the corrupt will help them; and even the corrupt are unreliable ...

The psychological development of Spartacus himself has an epic simplicity. At first he is a slave, an animal, his only pride the revengeful, mad-dog gesture of biting a soldier's calf and not-letting go. He makes that "contemptible" gesture of individualist defiance-unto-death which, for Kirk, is the irrational, amoral reflex on which courage is built. Gradually he comes to awareness. First, there is the prostitute (Jean Simmons) who is pushed into his gladiator's cell, with whom he falls in love, to whom he confesses that he has never had a woman, to whom he refuses to make love because his voyeuristic overseer is watching through a grating. Thus he discovers his humanity: then he discovers ethics. A fellow-gladiator, a negro, defeats him in a duel to the death, refuses to kill him, hurls his trident at their persecutors, and is killed. Another futile gesture, another martyr, another lesson. Freedom is not "cut-throat competition" between equals, it is class-solidarity. In revolt, the gladiators tear down their cage, use it as a battery of spears: their "common cell", their unity becomes their aggressive strength. Later, Jean Simmons beseeches Kirk Douglas: "Order me to love you ..." He obeys her, and orders her. Love is the voluntary repudiation of freedom, in love freedom and slavery are one. Later, all the slaves say

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(1) Is Kirk well to the left of American centre (as, one suspects, Aldrich and Kubrick are?) Maybe; but most American left-wingers, are left-wing because they are anarchists, whereas the European left-winger is more likely to be inspired by classic Marxist class loyalties (the English left-winger, especially if he is an intellectual, is often inspired by a nonconformist, i.e. bourgeois puritan, conscience).

(2) The film was highly censored in France, and it's not surprising, for Laurence Olivier plays the part of General de Gaulle. Aristocratic representative of "order" and "virtue", he stomps out of parliament in high dudgeon, and then condescends to take dictator's powers to save the country from armed rebellion.

to their captors: "I am Spartacus". And by going to their deaths for him, for the sake of his legend, they prove they are.

Decent killers, prostitutes, negroes — it's a conventional American cast of characters, but the mythology is hallowed by tradition and acts here as a particularly sharp slap in the face of American pharasaism. Paradoxically enough, it's the two most bribable Romans who turn out to have been the noblest of them all, and who conclude with a little self-respect: Laughton as the leader of the plebs, and Peter Ustinov as the cowardly showman-cum-carpetbagger who isn't devoted to "the system" but only acquieses in it for the money and through fear. The implied forgiveness of a well-known American weakness (for the almighty dollar), is contradicted in the unsympathetic view of the Jewish character, Herbert Lom as a Levantine pirate. One is reminded of that quick flash, Jew-locks-out-negro, in *Sodom and Gomorrah*. In *Paths of Glory* Kubrick underlines the Jewishness of the most "cowardly" prisoner, in *Lolita* he stresses Humbert's Jewishness and his persecutor's anti-Semitism. The complex of attitudes is hard to disentangle; it is as if a Jewish consciousness of prejudice, together with a self-deprecating Jewish humour, combined into a paraded self-criticism. The Jew incarnates the fallibility renounced by American perfectionism, he establishes a deep, human complicity with everyone...

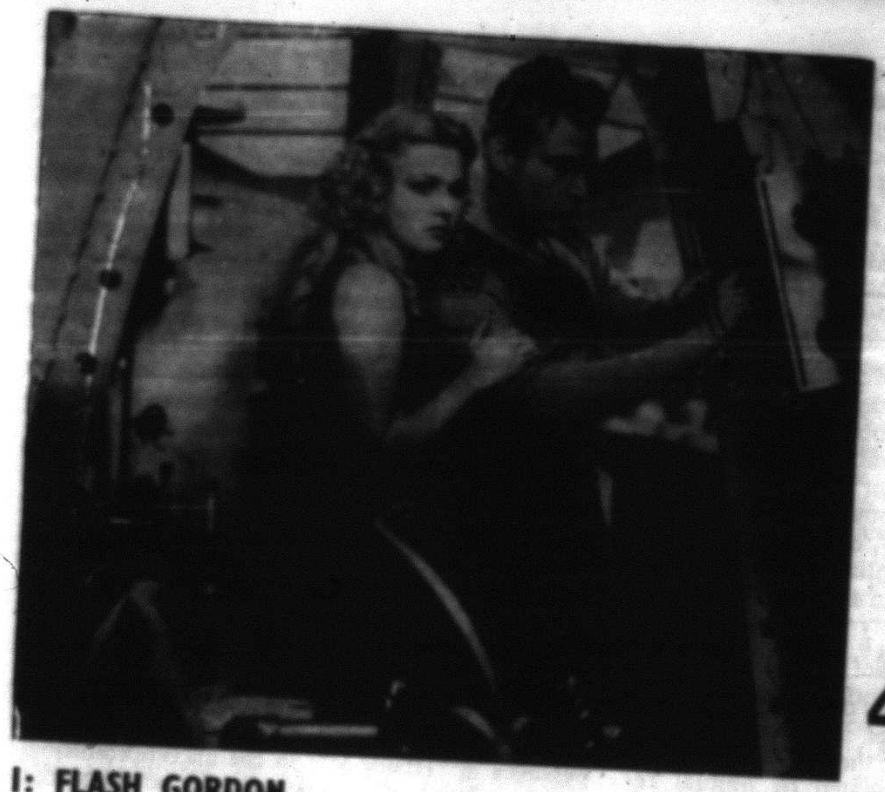
The key to this apparent ambivalence about Jewishness lies in the handling of the film's homosexual theme. Poet-slave Tony Curtis quits Olivier because the latter's homosexual proclivities have veered in his direction. Beween artist Tony and warrior Kirk there springs up an emotion whose fervour is a direct challenge to the audience to label it a homosexual one. The final duel between Kirk Douglas and Tony Curtis, in which each out of love attempts to kill the other and save him from a slower death on the cross, is even more troublé than the finale of *The Singer Not the Song*. It is as if Kubrick were striving to confuse, to destroy, our hypochondriacal anxiety (a puritanical derivative) to classify every emotion as either "healthy" or "unhealthy". He also wants to break through the "emotional barrier" in which the Anglo-Saxon male so often lies encased. (And it also enables Kubrick to make the only epic which accurately reflects the prevalence of homosexuality in classical antiquity).

Disturbing too is the number of virtual suicides in the film: Kirk's initial gesture, the negro's refusal to kill, Laughton's suicide, the battle (from the moment the reinforcements appear), the 6,000 crucifixions for the sake of a legend, the duel, and at last, Jean Simmons' cry to her lover on the cross, as she shows him their baby: "Die, my darling, why don't you die . . . " Woman gives life, woman is the symbol of merciful death . . . Suicide is asserted as an act of pagan dignity against the Christian notion that it is a sin. For after all, if liberty means any thing it entails the right to end one's own existence . . .

The film is impolite to Christianity (despite the lip-service paid in the opening moments of the commentary). The one crucifixion is devalued by the six thousand. The Christian propogandist's technique of drawing attention to Christ's physical sufferings as if they too were unique is neutralised. Here are 6,000 Christs who nobly took up the sword and nobly perished by the sword. All the slaves say "I am Spartacus". If Christ was the individual who suffered for all, here, all suffer for one. The film revolts against the implicit hierarchicalization of Christian theology, with God the Absolute Monarch accepting the only worthy sacrifice, His own. Here is a democracy of sacrifice. (Romantic? the British did not have to introduce conscription until halfway through the first world war: one way or another, the twentieth century has been rich, disturbingly rich, in such sacrifice).

Spartacus, apparently so schematic, is morally a very complex film. If in the last resort it misses greatness, it is, paradoxically, because of the Kubrick brittleness. Kubrick is clever, mischievous, courageous, relentless, an anarchist, anti-puritan moralist, and that most formidable of creatures, a cynical liberal. His moral values always budget for the ambivalence of human nature, that is, for the fundamental *identity* of virtue and vice, egoism and altruism. Hence, in his work, sacrifice retains all its beauty; it is never cheapened by being taken for granted. But as an example of his artistic limitations we would cite the scenes of fulfilled passion between Kirk and Jean (those of frustrated passion are splendid). Kirk's forked-lightning personality never slides easily into love-scenes, and these love-scenes are almost the director's stiffest test. They don't ring false, but the intelligent calculation shows. Kirk and Jean act well, but separately. King Vidor, perhaps, could have brought it off. *Spartacus* has a tragic tension, a superbly calculated moral logic rather than a continuity of emotional explosions. Yet it remains the most sympathetic, the most courageous "epic" in the history of the American cinema.

Raymond Durgnat



4 EPICS

1: FLASH GORDON

THE FIRST EPIC HERO with a hi-sci background, the Ulysses of the spaceways (except that he took Penelope along on his astronautical wanderings) was Flash Gordon, featured in two Universal serials, *Flash Gordon*, a 13-chapter adventure produced in 1936, and *Flash Gordon's Trip To Mars*, 15 episodes directed by Ford Beebe and Robert Hill in 1938. A splendid blending of the technological man, familiar with spaceographs and hydrocycles, and the classical hero with his enduring qualities of courage, resourcefulness, and resolution, Flash Gordon remained true to the abiding spirit of the great epic heroes.

On the planet Mongo in *Flash Gordon* he had to face shark-men, monkey-men, lion-men, he was pitted against tigrons and pre-historic monsters as he and his two constant companions, Dr. Zarkov and Dale Arden, tried to deflect the merciless Ming, self-styled 'Emperor of the Universe', from crashing his planet into Earth. Two years later Ming had joined with the Martians to suck the entire supply of nitrogen from Earth's atmosphere, so Flash had to pit his wits against Martians (there were, though, some good Martians who resisted the evil Ming) and tree-men and, possibly the most dangerous of all, the beautiful Azura, Queen of Magic. Flash emerged triumphant because he battled evil solely through his bravery and daring — once, it is true, Dr. Zarkov had to use an invisible-ray gun to rescue Flash from his enemies, but such episodes were rare.

This was undeniably a world of comic-strip, but like the comic-strip origins of Cottafavi's *Hercules Conquers Atlantis* and Bava's *Hercules in the Centre of the Earth* it penetrated deep into the true epic worlds of the eternal heroes. The Martian civilisation created in *Flash Gordon's Trip To Mars* was a strange mixture of Lang's *Metropolis* and C.S. Lewis's allegorical imaginings in his tale 'The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe', as Flash battled this superior, but soulless, civilisation (complete with light beams across which people could walk, one of the few really mismanaged effects in the series) on behalf of Earth and, later, of the enslaved Clay-men, human beings who had been turned to clay by Azura.

Flash was neither as indestructable nor as invulnerable as later figures of serial and comic-strip such as the pallid Superman; the world created here was a homogenous one replete with the moralities of light and dark drawn from epic myth. Flash regularly faced death unafraid. In *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars* (in my opinion the more interesting, though less well-made of the two), he was trapped in an electrode-room, but he escaped; he was strapped into an iron chair while the disintegrating ray of a death-machine was brought into play, but he escaped; he and the Doctor were lured into a laboratory where high explosive had been substituted for chemicals, but he escaped.

Yet his escapes were never inevitable, preordained; there was always the possibility that his brand of human courage would prove unavailing against the superior scientific knowledge of his enemies. When chapter 14 of *Flash Gordon's Trip To Mars* ended on Ming's triumphant cry, 'Flash Gordon dies !', it seemed entirely possible that his spirit would blaze off like a comet or some ghost-rider of the skies but that his body would be left (if it hadn't disintegrated) for a melancholy journey back to Earth. But Flash Gordon, in his way, was a small celebration of the ultimate triumph of the human virtues, a kindred spirit to that valiant company of whom the Greek poets sang.

Richard Whitehall

2: THE ALAMO

A MONUMENTAL SCALE : a sustained concentration on a heroic leader or a group of heroic leaders: and the embodiment in these heroes of courage and chivalry for their own sake rather than, finally, for the sake of the social-political causes on whose behalf the chivalry and courage are nobly employed — such, for me, are the three essential qualities of the epic in any art form: and, in the cinema, I have only found them completely in four films — *Potemkin*, *Alexander Nevsky*, *The Seven Samurai*, and *The Alamo*.

Time and again the clashes of the self-sufficient screenplay, the clashes of the self-sufficient young Colonel Travis and the legendary knifeman Jim Bowie are punctuated by mutual recognition of bravery: and moments like Bowie's reluctantly admiring "That long-winded jackanapes certainly doesn't waste time in starting a war", when Travis cuts short the Mexican dictator's ultimatum to the rebelliously seceding Texans by an eloquently defiant cannon retort, or his "I wouldn't have liked a coward facing my duelling pistol", when he sees Travis coolly pick off a charging enemy in battle.

But it's in the film's final hour, with the start of the siege proper, that the epical grandeur becomes explicit. In the Mexican leader's chivalrous permission to the republicans to evacuate their women and children before combat; in poignant vignettes such as the trooper who asks a departing stranger if he can say goodbye to her as he has no family, and the blind woman who insists that her hesitant husband stay to prove his manhood; in the elegiac nocturnal compositions of the waiting victims reflecting on their lives throughout the eve of conflict, which survive comparison with similar passages in "Henry V"; in the uncompromisingly horrible detail of violence in the actual slaughter . . . Yet *The Alamo* is ultimately a tale of triumph, not disaster: a tale of bold endeavour in the great poetic tradition of "Maldon" or the "Chanson de Roland'.

Douglas McVay

C T V D

Cinema-TV-Digest. Quarterly review in English of serious foreign-language cinema-tv criticism — Italian, Russian, French, Czech, Brazilian, Belgian, etcetcetc. Useful to cinephiles, cinelogues, universities, show-business folk. 25-30 pp. $2.95 yrly in US, $3.45 all elsewhere. Sample copy, 85c US, 95c elsewhere, from

HAMPTON BOOKS, Hampton Bays, NY USA.

3: HOW THE WEST WAS WON

Sensation for its own sake has never been more grandly offered. Along with the images on-screen, we shoot the black, swollen waters of the Ohio rapids; experience the alarm of attack by a Cheyenne war-party; become involved in a Civil War charge; find ourselves smack in the middle of a buffalo stampede; get caught up in a catastrophic railway crash. Subjected to this torrent of physical sensation, it's easy to see how — though hard to appreciate why — the majority of the critics failed to recognize and acknowledge the truly epic qualities of the film. H.T.W.W.W. is much more than a single story of a hero battling against odds to fulfil his destiny. Rather, it's the story of the birth-pangs, of the forward-surge of a nation: an epic of *time* and *place* rather than of persons; a saga of national spirit, of the conquest of an unawakened land by hardy pioneer stock.

But one shouldn't be so blind as to miss the film for its story and trimmings, and beyond its surface gloss there are poetic roots to be felt. The conquest of the American West lives on in the minds of most of us as one the great adventures of all time. Endless songs have been sung about it, poems and books have been written about it, films have told and re-told its myths and legends a thousand times over.

What H.T.W.W.W. sets out to do, and succeeds splendidly in achieving, is to capture the hardy spirit of the event through a family chronicle structure like *La Terra Trema*.

The John Ford-directed episode ("The Civil War") as an example of how the Giant Cinerama Screen should be used is a model of its kind but surely no less effective is the style of Henry Hathaway throughout the first half and the last quarter of the opus. Bold and bloody when need be (the savage fight with the river pirates, the climactic gun-battle aboard the runaway train), and soft and touching just as frequently (the James Stewart/Carroll Baker romance; Robert Preston's quiet courting of Debbie Reynolds), his control is resolute, purposeful and with a largeness of spirit wholly suited to its epic tale. Perhaps only in George Marshall's co-direction is the dead hand of professionalism inclined to make itself felt. But even in his scenes (the "Railroad" episode) one senses the essential spirit of the film. Its epic ring is loud and clear.

John Cutts

4. ROCCO: 1st EPIC OF REALISM

VISCONTI IS ONE of the few non-Russian Europeans capable of working to the epic scale (just who else is there? Abel Gance? Aleksander Ford? The list is short, and not particularly distinguished. Even Renoir failed with *La Marseillaise*). His earlier films—*La Terra Trema*, *Senso* — have a breadth of conception and imaginative sweep, but *Rocco* is, for me, the one true epic of European cinema. Visconti wasn't working to the piddling little reach-me-down tradition of British naturalism (which makes nonsense of so many British critiques of his film, particularly that foolish remark that 'Visconti's view of the working class has always been aristocratic') but to the Tolstoyan scale; a huge, chaotic, epical masterpiece which goes way beyond the break-up of the Parondi family to mirror a whole social world.

Other films have tried to make an epic of the disintegrating south — *Gone With The Wind* tried to do something similar for America's South, but it lacked an historical perspective (a quality which stamps *How The West Was Won* with the true epical proportions) and, above, all, its characters lacked a sense of destiny — Scarlett O'Hara, when all is said and done, is merely a selfish little egoist — so that the film was never broad-based, the landscape of events narrowed into little more than a painted backdrop.

Rocco, on the other hand, is conceived on a scale of epical grandeur, even the passions (the brothers weeping together on the bed, the stabbing of Nadia) are elemental with a *Lear*-like awesomeness. In form, the division into five chapters corresponding to the five brothers, and in content, the corruptive influence of the city, the film builds a complex of characters (three of them are developed to an extraordinary depth) and situation which gives it the density of a great work of art (not just a work of cinematic art) comparable to the greatest that has been produced in European literature or music over the last decade.

According to my dictionary an epic, using the word as adjective rather than noun, is a narrative or heroic poem 'narrated on the grand scale'. Certainly Visconti's admixture of lyricism, formalism, ritual, realism, romanticism, combines in an epical form of realism, something conceived and carried out on the grand scale. The sense of honour between brothers, which is the mainspring of the action in *Rocco* (which turns Rocco into a saint, and Simone into a beast) is a fragmentation of the code of honour by which the epic heroes have lived throughout the centuries — if we wanted to universalize him, Rocco could be Roland — but, unlike most epical characters, Visconti has set his people firmly and definitively in a particular time and place (the world of Western

to page 62

LIKING good cinema is one thing and putting hard cash behind your taste is another. The critics do the liking well enough (or do they?) but their influence can only work on the films that they are given the opportunity to see. We rely very heavily on the few companies that exist by releasing off-beat and difficult pictures, and the sudden, spectacular rise of Sebricon Productions to join their ranks is one of the most encouraging developments in the distribution set-up.

Sebricon was founded in October 1961 and the name blends those of its original three directors, one of whom has since dropped out. The Chairman is an Indian, Bachoo Sen, whose background includes work in production. Sebricon's ultimate aim is to go into production in this country, initially in partnership just as it eased its way into distribution by releasing its first pictures through established companies.

In fact, you can look on the print of Jacques Demy's *Lola* and not find Sebricon at all, only a Compton credit. Sadly (for the many of us who cherish the film), this first Sebricon release was not a success. The company wasn't too happy at its being shackled to a ponderous Dutch feature (one of that odd batch that Mondial last put out) at the Paris-Pullman but was not in a position to argue the point. *Lola* really deserved to stand alone. Bachoo Sen feels the film will have made a better financial showing by the time that the rights expire because of its special following that will happily see it over and over.

Sebricon's first big move was the purchase of *Marienbad*, for release through Compton-Cameo. This move became quite a joke among the cynics of Wardour Street. Looking back, Sen feels that his considerable success with the film has made the valuable point that a small outfit can pay big money and put a film over properly. (This is important to the producer because he retains a percentage interest above the basic payment for distribution rights). Most of the companies dealing in quality pictures will take unlikely or chancy films but rarely put much down for them: the potential blockbusters generally go to the bigger companies.

Sen points to *Marienbad* as a case where publicity really did the trick. He never resents adverse criticism providing it is honest, but he does resent the absence of criticism, particularly in the case of *Rendezvous at Midnight* which too many critics diligently viewed but subsequently forgot to review. In fact, *Marienbad* largely received knocking notices from the press ("The Sunday Times" notably excepted) but the controversy has drawn in crowds to bookings in sophisticated locations. Much the same technique was used to promote the film in France by Resnais and Robbe-Grillet when the distributor, turned down at Cannes, wanted to release this very expensive production and cut his losses. Special screenings for prominent figures on the French cultural scene created a wave of interest that carried it to Venice and an award. As a kind of parallel, Sen interested "The Observer" in running a pro and con article prior to the official review which came out against it.

The least familiar of the Sebricon releases is *A Day of Sin*, actually Mauro Bolognini's *La Giornata Balorda*, which hardly cut a good image by being exhibited under this title, at the Cameo-Royal, and in the American dubbed version. On the latter point, Sen reluctantly bowed to outside pressure seeking easier profit. Paired with *Fires on the Plain* by Compton-Cameo, the film did at least achieve wide currency.

Leon Morin Priest was handled by Contemporary which resulted in an Academy opening and good access to the 16 mm market where most of the film's commercial potential lies. It had a reasonable run at the Academy and a good reception from the critics. It will

be a great pity if its apparently religious angle condemns it to neglect as it becomes available to the provinces. The last word of the title is now being dropped to boost the confidence of exhibitors.

For 16mm. distribution Sen has now formed a new company with R. D. Purie (responsible for acquiring *Black Orpheus* and *Accattone* for British distribution) called Bachoo Sen Promotions which will handle Bargate and Sebricon product.

There is a present trend of creating blockbusters among foreign films, grooming them to seize an undue proportion of the limelight and squeezing out the less exploitable films that come between. Sen himself admits to contributing to this situation, putting his *Cleo* or *Marienbad* over more emphatically than the recent *Rendezvous at Midnight*. Yet in fact *Rendezvous* was a big success at the Glasgow Cosmo, rather more so than *Cleo*, probably because it seized far more space in the press there (and because Glasgow taste dislikes anything at all avant-garde). *Cleo*, like *Leon Morin*, deserves to be shown widely. Whether certain cinemas will rise to the challenge of screening them or will stick to more obviously commercial fare will be an acid test of their particular claims to be "art" theatres. It is sobering to reflect that many less colourful but worthwhile films will perhaps not achieve twenty bookings on first-run.

The Jean Pierre Mocky comedy, *The Snobs*, was the first film that Sebricon financed for distribution alone. Here George Mayhew's brilliant poster of the prostrate Tati-like figure against a purple background did much to get the film off the ground, along with short but encouraging notices from the press. It is reckoned that business at Brighton was well ahead of that for *Marienbad* largely because the cinema (unlike some others) displayed fifty of the posters.

Cinemas such as the Academy and Paris-Pullman have recognised the importance of graphic design in promoting an image (though not the Curzon, *vide* its hideous posters for *The Doll*), but among film companies it is rare. However, Sebricon, like the Paris-Pullman, have regularly commissioned Mayhew with often brilliant results.

Agnes Varda's *Cleo*, Bresson's *The Trial of Joan of Arc*, and a Jacques Baratier comedy *He She or It (La Poupée)* complete the line-up to date. These three were also internally financed for distribution by Sebricon itself. There should be ten or twelve pictures appearing annually. Some of these will be more blatantly commercial, but Sen declares that they will still have some thing to be said in their favour. The forthcoming Duvivier thriller (out of John Dickson Carr), *The Curse*, will be of this order, along with a Spanish-Italian swashbuckling piece called *Zorro* which is specially designed to fit the holiday period when exhibitors are starved for suitable product. The reissue of *M. Hulot's Holiday* should come in useful then and it will in fact have a multiple opening for August Bank Holiday week.

Besides the *Zorro*, Sebricon must set its box-office hopes high on the new Mocky film *The Virgins*. Chabrol's *Ophelia* is more recognizably the Sebricon type of film. *Every-thing for Love* is simply designed to be an entertaining film. They will not venture much into the shorts field with the present restricted market, but Sebricon have bought their first short film, made by a TV director Robert Kitts in his spare time on the Clifton Suspension Bridge and entitled *Impasse*.

The heavy bias to date in favour of French films (echoed in the trade as a whole) only partly reflects the ease of dealing with producers so near at hand, for a feeling of genuine enthusiasm for the artistic qualities of each film has been an essential prerequisite in the case of Sebricon. Of course, Bachoo Sen will balance his regard for a film with its commercial potential, but often the record of a director's past work is sufficient assurance on both counts. *Lola* is one of his very favourite films, and Sen will be greatly sorry if he doesn't handle Demy's next feature despite his experience with *Lola* at the box-office. He had tried to get Antonioni's *The Eclipse* before even seeing it: losing this and *Jules et Jim* are two of his saddest experiences in competing for films, while possessing *The Trial of Joan of Arc* is one of his triumphs.

Torre Nilsson's *Hand in the Trap* is another film that interests him but for which too much is being asked. Other films like Jean Luc Godard's *Le Petit Soldat* and Reichenbach's *Uu Coeur Gros Comme Ça* seem to him to have no commercial potential but he would like to bring them over for a few showings without actually purchasing the rights, a practice confined at present to programming at the National Film Theatre.

However, Sen has many more innovatory ideas on hand and his success to date suggests that we will see them realised. They may ultimately affect the present set-up in exhibi-

tion where more cinemas with the atmosphere of the Paris-Pullman, now the favourite outlet for Sebricon releases, are needed. Beyond the reluctance of cinema owners to experiment with difficult films frequently lies the problem of poor viewing facilities, including the difficulty of reading subtitles in a crowded cinema almost anywhere.

Whether, beyond this, Sebricon may ultimately influence the ancient monument called British Film Production remains to be seen.

★ ★ ★

The film trade will have a stronger argument to back its antagonistic attitude towards the foreign films recently screened by the BBC when it does a more efficient job of releasing them itself.

Very much a case in point is *The Lady with the Little Dog*, premiered less than a year before it was televised. Its distributors, Contemporary, say that it had "very few showings" and reached only a handful of the big cities. These did *not* include Manchester, Birmingham or Bristol, for instance. It is becoming increasingly harder to get bookings for artistic films which are losing out to more sensationalist fare.

Even at best an audience of 400,000 might get to see a foreign film, compared to a TV viewing public of 7-8 million. A vast proportion of these have possibly never seen a foreign film owing to their salacious or esoteric aura. In any case, such films don't reach the smaller towns; only the German *Ordered to Love* has had a release over one of the two major circuits in recent months.

When Contemporary sold the rights of *Lady with the Little Dog* to BBC-TV, it was with the above situation in mind, according to Charles Cooper, the company's managing director. By contrast, the Wajda trilogy, which was also sold, had had a far better release and Cooper considers the three films pretty well spent as far as commercial bookings were concerned. These four films, then, were selected to give the best impression of foreign films in the hope of agitating the public to demand them from local exhibitors.

But Cooper feels that *Lady with the Little* Dog should still be a good theatrical proposition. The reputation established by the TV showing should encourage those who missed it to catch up with it now; and the inferiority of television as a medium should make people anxious to see it under better conditions.

The trouble here is that the trade makes a practice of not booking films which have been televised. The Classic cinemas found substantial demand for some of the old Warner pictures a few weeks after their being televised, but encountered criticism which seems to have put an end to it. However, Cooper reports an upsurge of interest from film societies, reflecting a demand from members to see or re-see the Wajda films. Here one might interpose a query as to whether film societies offer much better viewing conditions than TV for the outsider; and I know of a university film society that had long ago booked *A Generation* for some ten days after the TV screening and received several complaints.

I subscribe to the Contemporary point of view that a selection of films of this high standard should have done a useful job of stimulating the public appetite. But this is not the only one, and Bachoo Sen of Sebricon, for instance, believes that the audiences for the two mediums only overlap in one direction: filmgoers will stay at home for television and that the TV showings haven't recruited a single individual for the cinema. Certainly, no-one is anxious to see films of this standard being televised every week, and Contemporary continue to see themselves as "essentially distributors to cinemas". Although Cooper says that "nothing else is contemplated" for release to TV from his lists, this does not stop the BBC negotiating abroad and it was from Argos Films of Paris, the actual producers, that they secured *Hiroshima Mon Amour*.

Contracts in general leave the television rights in the hands of the British distributor or else preclude their sale during the period of a film's lease (usually in the region of seven years). But this is apparently not always so, and some distributors are circularising producers to warn them of a boycott if they undermine the trading position here. And distributors here who let films go to TV are likely to have difficulty in getting theatrical bookings for their other releases.

Meanwhile one could hope for fewer of the exhibitors like the man in Dublin who was sent a print of *Wild Strawberries* to consider it for a booking and declared it fit for a one night stand at a film society. When another cinema subsequently took it, the film stood up for seven weeks.

★ ★ ★

Fortunately, enterprise isn't entirely lacking, and I'm particularly glad to see it being applied to the Vogue at Tooting Broadway, South London, since I seem to have spent most of my early youth there attending the double-U programmes. But now the Vogue has gone "All Adult" and is "South London's most DARING cinema." When I dared to venture in there recently for *Shadow of Adultery* it was packed out. What, besides the double-X shows every week, is the trick? I quote from an informative leaflet released by the Publicity Controller of the circuit:

> The programmes have been publicised by an attractive "hostess", lovely Diane Marsh, who has been on hand to greet cinemagoers and to distribute programme details to passers-by.
> The Continental atmosphere is immediately apparent to Vogue patrons when they find the entrance doors opened, not by the customary cinema commissionaire but by a realistic "gendarme", complete with distinctive cape and baton. Once within the Foyer, the filmgoers are serenaded with true French "musette" accordion melodies by much-travelled VIVIAN, in his cheery beret.
>
> Patrons may also be lucky enough to catch an impromptu song or two from attractive Vivian Sorel who is in reality the cinema's ice-cream sales girl during the evenings, but can't resist joining in a Continental chorus now and again.

Allen Eyles

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POST-MORTEM ON VIOLENCE

Dear Sirs,

Congratulations on your violence issue, the best, most comprehensive treatment of the theme I, for one, have seen . . . A special bravo for Ian Fleming's article on the fascinating *Peeping Tom* . . . and to both of you for having the guts to reprint in English Joubert's piece on the Japanese cathartic cinema.

In the Dassin piece, which seems to me to overrate that gentleman's recent productions, I was amazed to see no mention of *Night and the City*, which besides being his most accomplished film, is the one in which violence is most successfully integrated into the very fabric of the film through an extraordinary animal symbolism which makes the film one huge bestiary and gives new meaning to the "law of the jungle" cliché. But then maybe it is the film's British origin which gripes you (just as we here have a hard time taking *Rififi* seriously).

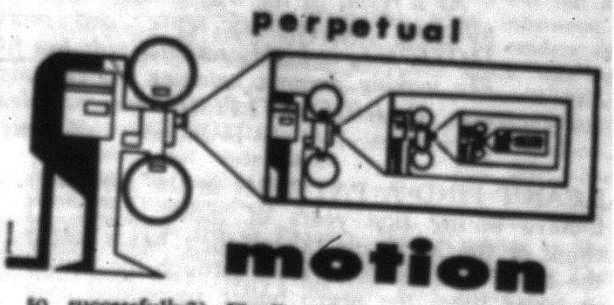
Then too, I was surprised to find so little attention paid to the two American directors who seem to me to display the most consistent preoccupation with the erotic implications of violence. I refer to Sam Fuller and Kubrick. The latter, in fact, who is obviously more self-conscious than the former, strikes me as the most kinky director around, with the possible exception of Bunuel. I am thinking especially of the scene in *Killer's Kiss* in which the monstrous dance-hall proprietor tries to get his girl hot by making her watch the handsome boxer-hero get his brains bashed out on TV, and of Peter Sellers's ecstatic evocation of mixed judo sessions in *Lolita*. I am also told that the uncensored version of *Spartacus* (shown for only a few weeks in New York) went pretty far at times, too.

NOEL BURCH,
75 Blvd Montparnasse,
Paris, 6.

Thanks for the lapsus typewritae — see Ian Fleming's articles in this issue.—Eds.

THANK YOU for the MOTION on Violence and Sadism, which is perhaps a little too entertaining: shouldn't the approach have been a little more serious? No doubt everyone will want to remedy omissions which were probably unavoidable in your limited space. Here are some items which seemed more or less glaringly absent.

In the "My Eyes, No, Not My Eyes" section Bunuel's "La Mort dans le Jardin" should have been mentioned, as well as "Un Chien Andalou"; the blinding of the prison guard with a pen-nib is only one of the incidents which make this surely Bunuel's most violent film. But why doesn't Bunuel have a section to himself? Next: in "The File on Thelma Jordan" Barbara Stanwyck stubs out a cigarette in Dan Duryea's right eye, thereby precipitating them both and the car he is driving into a ravine. (He's the villain, and though Barbara is his girl, she's had a change of heart. She survives the crash long enough to confess to the murder she has just been acquited of). About the famous blinding scene in "Samson and Delilah" — apart from adding colour, De Mille lifted this practically frame for frame from "Noah's Ark", which was directed by Michael Curtiz! (Again, why no section on De Mille? Who else exploited audiences' taste for sadism so consistently and



so successfully?) Finally, there was a shoddy little film a few years back called "Lady Godiva" (Maureen O'Hara) in which Victor McLaglen carefully blinded Peeping Tom with a red hot poker.

I wish you could have found space for a discussion of black comedy. One of the blackest is Bob Hope's "The Princess and the Pirate", with its strange and disturbing atmosphere of violence (an inn, "The Bucket of Blood", has a sign over its door consisting of a bucket which is kept filled with human blood).

The still from "Captain Blood" on page 11 is wrongly described. The "villain" is Errol Flynn and he is not fingering the chained man's wounds but commiserating with him!

DEREK S. COX
113 Corringham Road,
London, N.W.11.

Touché !—Eds.

The Committee has told me to inform you we shall not require any further copies of your magazine. They feel that the last issue was entirely unnecessary and rather revolting.

HON. SEC.
CHELMSFORD AND DISTRICT
FILM SOCIETY

★ ★ ★

A LITTLE BIRD . . . . .
chirrups a rumour for whose truth we absolutely don't vouch: that John Trevelyan bought 12 copies of our "Violence" issue, and sent one to each of his examiners, with the one-word comment, "See?".

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As a result of the traditional 'truth' 'beauty' and 'goodness,' i.e., between "significance" the aesthetic sense and morality, most film criticism, particularly MOTION'S, is highly rationalized: but films drift through most spectators' minds like waking dreams, catching his eye and his fancy in a powerful but wayward way. BARRIE PATTISON has rambledthrough his film memories in a revealing evocation of the irrationality of films and memories of films:

I CAN'T FIND A PATTERN in the memories I have of my first years of movie going. I think of the Mexicans raising their heads under the broad hats as Zorro rides through the square at siesta time; the negro butler suspended over the bottomless pit at the end of *The Hidden Hand*; the sentries' spears barring the way to Flora Robson in *Caesar and Cleopatra* the way the Chinese bayonets do with Gary Cooper in *The General Died at Dawn*; Charles Boyer rushing from the officers roaring their Hans May songs by the light of the burning punch bowl to find Darrieux waiting for him; Errol Flynn scaring the girl bathing in the tub as he rides thru the courtyard to meet John Litel in *San Antonio* or the sinister Charly who stands covered with an olive oil sweat as part of a Japanese atrocities exhibit for eleven episodes and then loses a brief scuffle with BAT-MAN in the final chapter.

Images, snatches of dialogue and some sounds too — Kosma's musical effects for *The Face of the Cat* with Bernhardt Wiki pretending to be a reluctant fascist beast; or the Barons' electronic track for *Forbidden Planet*; or the sound of the dancers' feet and the bursting balloons played backwards along with the picture (confetti falling upwards) in the number in *Give a Girl a Break*, all competing with the "doing" effect Lucille Ball gets from bumping the glass skull of the executive who has used the embalming lotion as hair-restorer in *Her Husband's Affairs*.

The thirties leave me with more odd-ball verbal images. I mean scenes like John Barrymore fending of the reporters in *State's Attorney* by telling them "Can't stop now boys. I'm going to the wash room to get my shoe laces pressed." There's Katherine Hepburn lovingly telling Cary Grant "David, your sock's on fire." (That's *Bringing Up Baby.)* Even more I recall *Midnight* with Claudette Colbert explaining that she first suspected Don Ameche's uncle when the wedding present he gave them turned out to be one roller skate in Thousand Island dressing. This was what Jack Webb and Richard Breen must have aimed for in *Pete Kelly's Blues* with scenes like the one where Webb faces up to Edmund O'Brien, ending by telling him "...and I hear you're so mean you got rubber lined pockets to steal soup."

The forties are something different — snatches of Earl Robinson ballads like the eulogy that opens Farrow's *California* ("...and the waves keep rolling till they come to the Golden Gate.") or his *Muscle Beach* song with its lyrics about compound fractures and the images of exercising beach boys running with the refrain telling that the summer time was the time to take it easy; and, of course:

"It was just a little walk in the warm Italian sun
but it was not an easy thing,
And poets are writing the tale of that fight
and songs for the children to sing."

The two rail fences William Cameron Menzies keeps running up for *North Star* or *Kings Row* finally becomes part of the plot when he gets round to designing and directing *Invaders from Mars*.

Albert Maltz's scene with the child's ball bouncing down the stairs to the feet of the murderer crops up in the scripts he did for *This Gun For Hire* and *Cloak and Dagger* and Daniel Mainwaring's idea of the ordinary suburban community where everyone finally proves to be part of a terrible conspiracy serves for *Phoenix City Story* and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. I suppose this is the reason that this mushroom crop of film writers seem so shallow when they try to reduce everything to the work of directors. Not to be too critical. If instead of getting Nick Ray and Bunuel from French magazines they'd got Busby Berkeley and Slavko Vorkapich from the American ones I'd be all for them, I suppose.

Spotting back references that musicians drop into their work is another way of putting in the time. It's a bit coy for the young people in *Susan Slade* to sit around listening to the Steiner theme from *Summer Place*, his earlier entry in this Delmer Daves matinée cycle. Jerome Moross seems to specialise in cannibalising his *Big Country* score for Wagon Train themes or music for *The Badlanders*, very different from his orchestrations for early Negulesco films like the *Mask of Demetrios* or *Three Strangers*. The strangest one is the Antheil theme which the orchestra plays as Jimmy Sarvo stands in the doorway before the ending that Hecht and MacArthur swiped from the supper scene in *The Gold Rush* for their 1935 *Once in a Blue Moon*. The same theme is the basis of Antheil's *Specter of the Rose* ballet for the film Hecht made ten years after.

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PERPETUAL MOTION COMPETITION

Mrs. B.—WHY, DENNIS BRELSFORDBURY, surely you're mad!
Are those tiears, I wonder, to laugh and be glad?
I suppose that, as usual, you've been in the cellar,
And, beast as you are, with the sis have got mellow
Dennis—Be quiet now, Mistress BRELSFORDBURY, dear.
And let me just whisper a word in your ear
Be easy, my darling, and open your eyes;
Don't you see I've got hold of a Capital Prize.

With *The Ladies' Man* Jerry Lewis broke the plot-barrier and plunged into comedy's fifth dimension. But since then the break-through has become a break-down and Jeronimo has floated out into a state of plotlessness which is neither here nor far-out but a sheer skid down the space-time warp inbetween. Constructive as ever, MOTION invites its readers to submit appropriately insane storylines which will be forwarded direct to the Nutty Professor himself. Prize for the best (in our opinion) entry: one year's subscription to MOTION. Just to banish bashfulness, the editors put their heads together and saw what fell out, to wit:— Our favourite unfilmable film, Tashlin's modern-dress version of Euripides' "Hippolytus", with BB as Phaedra, Peter Cushing as Big Daddy and Barbara Steele as Jerry's Nurse. The idea being to let Jerry's fits and BB's attack kick up an edgy nervous tension which, with the other two looming, would create an ambience as paroxysmatic as *Slap Happy Lion*. Then there's Jerry as a precocious King Lear, in modern dress, where he storms up and down a palace called Xanadu, finally wandering out into the heath in a snowstorm to find shelter in an abandoned streetcar named "Rosebud". Other horrible private jokes: Jerry Lewis as a Walter Mitty who's been bitten by the culture bug and day-dreams himself into being Leon Morin Prêtre, Archibaldo de la Cruz, Bresson's Pickpocket, the Long Distance Runner (against his will he wins all the events, because the Narkoverish governor, played by Alastair Sim, has smeared flubber on his boots), the Entertainer (in fact any John Osborne play, especially "Under Plain Cover" and the colic scenes from "Martin Luther"), Lawrence of Arabia and Jules ("is it Jules or is it Jim?"). In fact once you start comparing Jerry and Truffaut it's hard to know where

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to stop: *Les 400 Coups* is *The Delicate Delinquent*, *Jules et Jim* is practically a Martin-&-Lewis film already, and *Tirez Sur le Pianiste* is a sitting duck (with Peter Sellers in different disguises as all the other men).

Leaving aside *The Alfred E. Neumann Story*, or *It's A Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad* our most atrocious idea so far is *Marienbad Or Bust*, with Jerry as a dimwitted but loveable comedian who's read so many highbrow analyses of his gags' profound meanings that he no longer knows whether anything's funny or not. He gets all hypochondriac about humour, and drives his director (played by Otto Preminger) mad by hundreds of duff takes for every scene. There's an improvised sequence where he discusses humour with famous philosopher Brice Parrain — stamping on the other's hat, tearing off his sleeves, squirting a soda-water syphon down the front of his trousers, etc., and frantically enquiring, "Is that funny? does that make you laugh? huh?" He keeps blundering onto the neighbouring set where Monica Vitti is making an enigmatic tragedy and the last shot has them guffawing until the tears run down their cheeks and the word "Paramount" blossoms over the top of a distant volcano.

ROCCO *from page 55*

myth, which has produced so many of the cinema's epic heroes, is more symbolical than historical), they are shaped by the social conditions into which they are born.

Because he hasn't deliberately tried to distort his characters into symbols, because they live as *themselves* before they exist as representatives of a universal theme, because they inhabit a contemporary social world, Visconti's characters may seem less epical than, say, *Sir Gawaine and the Green Knight*, but the sense of chivalry hasn't entirely died in modern Milan and, through the richness and variety of the director's handling, *Rocco and his Brothers* attains the stature of an epic. All men are *brothers* . . .

Richard Whitehall.

The Editors wish to thank **John Kobal** for his invaluable assistance in assembling the illustrations, as well as **John Cutts, Rosemary Heawood, Douglas McVay,** and **"La Methode"** for the Flash Gordon still heading the "4 Epics" section (from their issue devoted to American comic strips). Also, **Edward Patman** of **MGM; BLC — Columbia** (Strangers When We Meet); **Contemporary** (The Seventh Seal); **Golden Era** (Hercules Conquers Atlantis, Hercules in the Centre of the Earth); **Miracle** (Viridiana); **Paramount** (The Naked Jungle); **Rank** (Spartacus, The Savage Innocents); **Sebricon** (The Trial of Joan of Arc); **United Artists** (Elmer Gantry, The Night of the Hunter); **the National Film Archive; the British Film Institute Publications Department; "Films and Filming"**; and **The Federation of Film Societies.**

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